COLLEGE FOOTBALL 2016

ESPN

CLEMSON RUNNING BACK

WAYNE GALLMAN

IS A QB'S BEST FRIEND

128

Team Scouting Reports

Recruiting Roundup

Playoff Picks

FOOTBALL POWER INDEX

1 LSU
2 FLORIDA STATE
3 OKLAHOMA
4 CLEMSON
5 TENNESSEE

HEY, TOLEDO, TEXAS A&M, THE STANFORD TREE, MISSISSIPPI STATE, CALIFORNIA, UNLV, MIAMI-FLORIDA, ARKANSAS, MARSHALL, KNOXVILLE BOATERS, UCLA, ARKANSAS STATE, APPALACHIAN STATE, VIRGINIA TECH, THE DRUMMER FOR THE WORLD'S LARGEST DRUM, GEORGIA SOUTHERN, BOWLING GREEN, SUPER FROG, NORTHERN ILLINOIS, BRIGHAM YOUNG, FAYETTEVILLE HOG CALLERS, WASHINGTON, ARIZONA, RUF/NEKS, WEST VIRGINIA, AUBURN, DUKE, BOISE STATE, HAWAII HAKA DANCERS, ARIZONA STATE, PENN STATE, SAN DIEGO STATE, IOWA PINK LOCKER ROOM PAINTERS, "THE U," OHIO, OREGON STATE, IDAHO, LOUISIANA-MONROE, OREGON UNIFORM DESIGNERS, NEW MEXICO STATE, HAWAII, WYOMING, CENTRAL FLORIDA, THE TALLAHASSEE SOD CEMETERY GARDENER, KENT STATE, NORTH TEXAS, KANSAS, ARMY, ANN ARBOR KHAKI PANTS WHOLESALERS, CHARLOTTE, EASTERN MICHIGAN, MEMPHIS, PITTSBURGH, NEBRASKA, NEVADA, COLORADO STATE, KENTUCKY, AUBURN TOILET PAPER VENDORS, MISSOURI, AKRON, AIR FORCE, PERSON WHO SITS SHOTGUN IN THE RAMBLIN' WRECK, UTAH STATE, INDIANA, WESTERN MICHIGAN, LOUISVILLE, SOUTH FLORIDA, TEXAS TECH, LIL' RED, NORTH CAROLINA STATE, USC SONG GIRLS, LOUISIANA TECH, CINCINNATI, TEXAS, LEE CORSO, SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI, COLORADO, KANSAS STATE, MINNESOTA, SAN JOSE STATE, GEORGIA STATE, DABO'S DANCE INSTRUCTOR, MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE, CENTRAL MICHIGAN, IOWA STATE,

MADISON JUMP AROUNDERS, TEXAS SAN ANTONIO, MIAMI-OHIO, FLORIDA ATLANTIC, PURDUE, SOUTHERN METHODIST, SPARTY, TULANE, BALL STATE, TEXAS STATE, GEORGIA TECH, VIRGINIA, TBDBITL, NEW MEXICO, CONNECTICUT, BIG AL, ALBERT, ALBERTA, TEXAS EL PASO, RICE, VANDERBILT, KIRK HERBSTREIT, RUTGERS, BUFFALO, BERKELEY CARD TURNERS, SOUTH CAROLINA, TULSA, RALPHIE THE BUFFALO, ILLINOIS, SOUTH ALABAMA, WAKE FOREST, SYRACUSE, MARYLAND, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL, EAST CAROLINA, TROY, THE DEMON DEACON'S MOTORCYCLE MECHANIC, LOUISIANA-LAFAYETTE, OLD DOMINION, FRESNO STATE, BOSTON COLLEGE, MASSACHUSETTS, WASHINGTON STATE, THE WASHINGTON STATE GAMEDAY FLAG, GEORGIA, WESTERN KENTUCKY, WISCONSIN, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, TEMPLE, TENNESSEE, COLLEGE STATION KISSERS, UTAH, NAVY, LSU, FLORIDA, HOUSTON, BAYLOR, OKLAHOMA STATE, OREGON, ATHENS HEDGE TRIMMERS, MICHIGAN, NORTHWESTERN, OLE MISS, TCU, UNC, FLORIDA STATE, NOTRE DAME, BEVO, OHIO STATE, STANFORD, IOWA, OKLAHOMA, MICHIGAN STATE, CLEMSON, ALABAMA, ARE YOU READY? YOUR ROAD TO THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF BEGINS LABOR DAY WEEKEND.

WHO'S IN ?

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF ON ESPN

CONTE

4 A QUALITY WIN-WIN
Thank you, College Football Playoff. Saturdays in September have never looked so good.
BY HEATHER DINICH

6 HEISMAN HOPEFULS
A trio of backs rush to follow in Derrick Henry's Heisman footsteps.
BY MARK SCHLABACH

8 PRESEASON ALL-AMERICANS
Theoretically, the country's best. Southern speed, Northern mass: one man's relative opinion.
BY MARK SCHLABACH

9 UNIT RANKINGS
Our TV talent scours the nation for top collections of talent from offensive backfields to defensive secondaries and everywhere between.

10 RUNNING BACKS ARE BACK
Feel the rush? You will this fall, as Stanford, LSU and Florida State lead contenders hoping to ride stud running backs all the way to Tampa Bay.
BY RYAN McGEE

130 RECRUITING NATION WATCH
Get prepped on all the 2016—and 2017—recruits you need to know.

134 2017 NFL DRAFT
Jared Goff is so 2016. Mel and Todd are already locked in on April 2017.

Team previews

Every name, number and notable position battle for the program you love and for the 127 you love to hate.

14 WAY-TOO-EARLY TOP 25
Too soon? Never. Mark Schlabach sets the scene for 2016's top 25, and not to be outdone, Insider Brad Edwards offers his can't-miss playoff forecast. (Welcome to the show, U-Dub!)

16 ACC
Don't look now, Deshaun Watson, but Florida State is hot on your trail.

32 BIG TEN
That team up north is rising, but it still hasn't beaten OSU since 2011.

48 BIG 12
Sorry, Texas (and Baylor and TCU). The schooner has left the station.

60 PAC-12
Can the best out West sneak back to the playoff? Is purple the new red?

74 SEC
The SEC is dead. Long live the SEC. Never change, football in the South.

90 INDEPENDENTS
Notre Dame, and its abundance of QBs, looks to crash the playoff party.

93 AMERICAN ATHLETIC
This is not a drill: Houston is trendy, but it may not even be the AAC's best.

100 CONFERENCE USA
How 'bout those Hilltoppers? (Trust us on this one.)

109 MID-AMERICAN
MAC favorites: WMU and BGSU. Will Michigan and Ohio *ever* get along?

117 MOUNTAIN WEST
No surprise here: The MW title runs through the Smurf Turf. Again.

124 SUN BELT
There's App State, Georgia Southern, Arkansas State ... and everyone else.

136 THE FOOTBALL POWER INDEX
Whether you're the No. 1 LSU Tigers or the No. 128 Mean Green from North Texas, you factor into FPI.

ILLUSTRATION PHOTO REFERENCE: BRETT DEERING/GETTY IMAGES

To buy all five covers—featuring Clemson RB Wayne Gallman, LSU RB Leonard Fournette, Ohio State QB J.T. Barrett, Oklahoma QB Baker Mayfield and Stanford RB Christian McCaffrey—go to espnmag.com/covers/collegefootball

COVER PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAYMON GARDNER

TOP 50

50
Samaje Perine

ESPN

ISSUE EDITORS	Hallie Grossman, John B. Morris, David Wilson
DEPUTY EDITORS	David Duffey, Ryan Hockensmith, Otto Strong
EDITORS	Ben Arledge, Ryan Canner-O'Mealy, Alecia Hamm, Brian Kelly, Tony Moss, Conor Nevins, Rachel Ullrich, Jeremy Willis, Joe Wojciechowski
EXECUTIVE EDITOR	Scott Burton
CREATIVE DIRECTOR	Chin Wang
ART DIRECTOR	Rami Moghadam
CONTRIBUTING ASSOCIATE DESIGNER	Heidi Smith
SENIOR DIRECTOR, PHOTOGRAPHY	Karen Frank
DEPUTY PHOTO EDITOR	Jim Surber
ASSISTANT PHOTO EDITOR	Rachel Weiss
PHOTO RESEARCHER	John Klein
SENIOR WRITERS	Ryan McGee, Mark Schlabach
WRITERS	Andrea Adelson, Edward Aschoff, Brian Bennett, Carl Carchia, Brandon Chatmon, David Ching, Heather Dinich, Gus Elvin, Kevin Gemmell, Gerry Hamilton, Craig Haubert, Chantel Jennings, Doug Mittler, Anthony Olivieri, Jared Shanker, Mitch Sherman, Jake Trotter, Max Tyler, Tom VanHaaren
SENIOR NATIONAL RECRUITING ANALYST	Tom Luginbill
SENIOR RECRUITING COORDINATOR	Jeremy Crabtree
RESEARCH CHIEF	Gueorgui Milkov
RESEARCH MANAGERS	Dale Brauner, John Mastroberardino
RESEARCHERS	Katie Barnes, Sachin Dave Chandan
CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS	Brian Good, Brendan Guinnane, Doug Orth
EDITORIAL OPERATIONS DIRECTOR	Christian Sean Rogers
EDIT OPERATIONS	Taryn Ayotte, Jed Davis, David Ortiz, Jonathan Wank
COPY DESK CHIEF	Steve Gordon
COPY EDITORS	Kerri Pedersen, Kathryn Sherer Brunetto, Jay Spiegel
SENIOR DIRECTOR, PRINT OPERATIONS	Chris Noble
PRINT OPERATIONS	Edmond Barredo, Patricia Elliott, Stephanie Fallon, Dennis Farley, Margo Guthlein, Thomas D. Murphy, Cindy Norman, Robert O'Malley, Ronald Staino, Jocelyn Strauber
VICE PRESIDENT, EDITOR IN CHIEF, ESPN THE MAGAZINE AND ESPNW	Alison Overholt
VICE PRESIDENT, DIGITAL DIRECT TO CONSUMER SERVICES	Damon Phillips
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, DIGITAL & PRINT MEDIA	John Kosner

ESPN, ESPN Plaza, Bristol, CT 06010
Customer service, 1-888-267-3684
ESNcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com
Print copies of this publication may be ordered through customer service and at ESPN.com/CollegeFootballPreview

COPYRIGHT 2016 ESPN. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT THE PERMISSION OF ESPN IS PROHIBITED.

ISSN # 1097-1998 PRINTED IN THE USA

A QUALITY WIN-WIN

Everyone knew the playoff would make January shine, but who could've guessed it would make September look so good too? BY HEATHER DINICH

Thank you, College Football Playoff, for inspiring more fall Saturdays like the one coming up on Sept. 3.

USC opens the season against defending national champ Alabama. Last year's runner-up, Clemson, faces Auburn. Oklahoma, a 2015 semifinalist, takes on potential playoff crasher Houston. Notre Dame visits Texas, while Wisconsin and LSU square off at historic Lambeau Field.

"There are some big games," says selection committee member Barry Alvarez. "That's the way it should be."

Amen.

The committee has made it clear: Man up and schedule up. The CFP has challenged not just athletic directors but entire conferences to flex their scheduling muscles. And while strength of schedule isn't the only factor used to determine the Top 25—CFP executive director Bill Hancock would be quick to point out that no criteria are weighted in this oh-so-subjective system—it is certainly one of the most oft-referenced and concrete measures the committee can point to when justifying its weekly rankings.

It's why a one-loss Bama was slotted in at No. 4 in the first CFP Top 25 last Nov. 3, ahead of four unbeaten Power 5 teams. It's why a one-loss Houston hit its ceiling at No. 18. And it's why the Sooners punched their semifinal ticket despite having fallen to 5–7 Texas.

"When we're comparing schools, we throw [strength of schedule] right up on the screen," Alvarez says. "Who had they played, what their opponents' records were. That's very important, your quality wins."

Which means fans should enjoy a philosophical scheduling shift toward more big September Saturdays.

Witness: The Big 12 has mandated that all schools (Baylor too!) play one noncon against the Power 5 or Notre Dame, effective as soon as existing contracts allow. The SEC too must face a Power 5 or "major independent" starting this year, while the ACC adopts a similar scheduling decree in 2017.

And here's what's fun about it: Losing is OK. No, really!

From 1998 to 2013, only 13 out of the 32 teams that vied for the BCS championship entered the title game with a regular-season loss. In the fledgling playoff era? Six of eight playoff teams have done so.

"You can recover," Alvarez says.

Just look at two-loss Stanford.

Thanks to "body-clock" issues, or just a dialed-in Northwestern, the Cardinal fell to the Cats in Evanston in Week 1 last year ... then beat Notre Dame, won the Pac-12 and, despite a loss to Oregon, finished in the conversation for a playoff spot at No. 6 in the CFP's final ranking.

"It allows there to be more than just a statistical analysis," says Stanford coach David Shaw. "That those conversations happen makes me feel a lot better. Forget about for us but for college football."

Of course, not every team is scheduling for the CFP—many are simply after an easy W and the six-win mark. But for the 25 programs (give or take) realistically vying for the sport's biggest prize, the importance of at least trying to beat one of their own is officially a movement.

"I think we'll see more challenging schedules in the near future," says Oklahoma AD Joe Castiglione. "But as much as everybody would love to see marquee nonconference games every single week, we have to realize that the difficulty of the conference schedule is always tough, regardless of what conference and what year." In other words: What's best for the fan isn't always best for the fan's team.

The key, he says, is striking a balance in the schedule, highlighted by one blockbuster opponent. Here comes the tricky part, though: It's a guessing game. Athletic directors often schedule as much as a decade in advance, so there is no way to guarantee an opponent will be top-five or even top-25 material. Strength of schedule also evolves throughout the season as opponents' résumés change. What might look like a big win in September can morph into a shrug come November.

Clemson AD Dan Radakovich knows those potential pitfalls well. He's on the committee. His program played for the 2015 title. And he has a formula: two Power 5 opponents (one of which is always rival South Carolina), one Group of 5 team and one in-state FCS squad.

"It shows that you're going out and trying to play at the highest level of the FBS, which is the Power 5 group," he says. "In any particular year, you have to be fortunate as your body of work is looked at. Were the teams you played really good?"

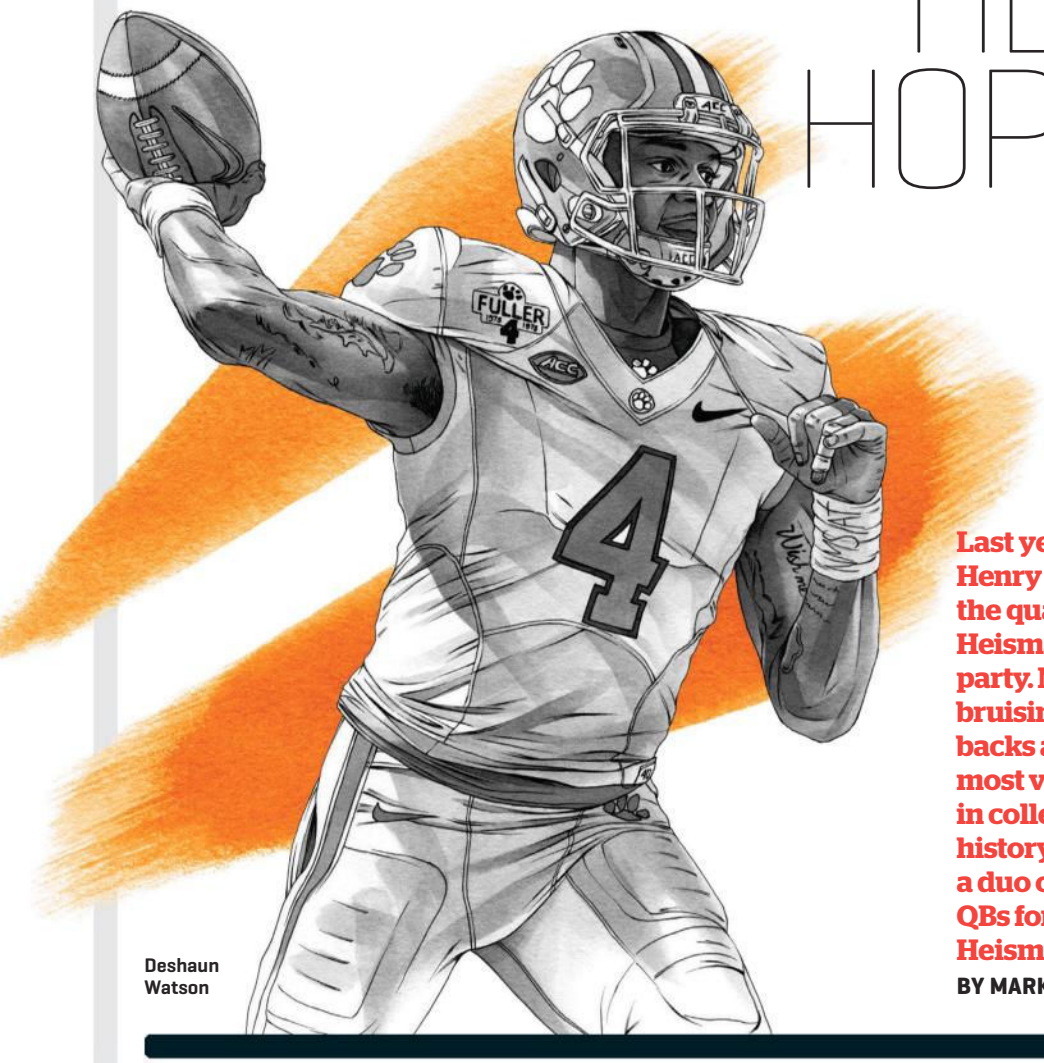
Many top-ranked teams playing on Sept. 3 will answer yes—win or lose. And that, ultimately, will be a victory for everyone.

ILLUSTRATION PHOTO REFERENCE BY JOE FARAONI/ESPN IMAGES; ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL HOEWELER

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL HOEWELER

WHY SETTLE FOR A SINGLE
GOOD CUP OF COFFEE,
WHEN YOU CAN HAVE A GOOD CUP OF COFFEE
EVERY SINGLE TIME.
KEURIG HOT
MAXWELL HOUSE
GOOD TO THE LAST DROP
THE ORIGINAL ROAST
MEDIUM
MAXWELL HOUSE
THE ORIGINAL ROAST
KEURIG
MAXWELL HOUSE
GOOD TO THE LAST DROP
THE ORIGINAL ROAST
MEDIUM
EACH MAXWELL HOUSE BLEND IS SELECTED FROM FIVE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BEANS, SO EVERY DELICIOUS CUP IS GOOD TO THE LAST DROP.
Keurig, the Cup and Star design, Keurig Brewed and K-Cup® are trademarks of Keurig, Incorporated. Used with permission. © 2016 Kraft Foods.

HEISMAN HOPEFULS



Deshaun Watson

Last year Derrick Henry crashed the quarterbacks' Heisman House party. Now two other bruising running backs and one of the most versatile backs in college football history will challenge a duo of dual-threat QBs for the 2016 Heisman Trophy.

BY MARK SCHLABACH

DESHAUN WATSON
CLEMSON QB, JR.

2015 STATS

333-of-491, 4,104 yards, 35 TDs, 13 INTs; 207 carries, 1,105 yards, 12 TDs

Less than one year removed from a serious knee injury, Watson led Clemson to an undefeated regular season and a spot in the CFP national championship as a sophomore. Can he lead the Tigers to a title as an encore?

CHRISTIAN McCAFFREY
STANFORD RB, JR.

2015 STATS

337 rushes, 2,019 yards, 8 TDs; 45 catches for 645 yards, 5 TDs; 2 passing TDs; 2 return TDs

If McCaffrey didn't play out West, he might have won the Heisman last season, when he became the first FBS player since 1996 to top 1,500 rushing yards, 500 receiving yards and 1,000 yards on kickoff returns in a single season.

BAKER MAYFIELD
OKLAHOMA QB, SR.

2015 STATS

269-of-395, 3,700 yards, 36 TDs, 7 INTs; 141 carries, 405 yards, 7 TDs

Mayfield has played with a sizable chip on his shoulder since not being offered a Big 12 scholarship out of high school, then earning and losing a starting job at Texas Tech before transferring. He'll again be highly motivated after he was passed over as a Heisman finalist last season.

LEONARD FOURNETTE
LSU RB, JR.

2015 STATS

300 carries, 1,953 yards, 22 TDs; 19 catches, 253 yards, 1 TD

Fournette was a Heisman snub last season after a November swoon, including just 31 yards at Alabama. He still gained 1,953 yards with 22 touchdowns, but the Tigers will have to throw the ball more effectively to prevent him from fading down the stretch again.

DALVIN COOK
FSU RB, JR.

2015 STATS

229 carries, 1,691 yards, 19 TDs; 24 catches, 244 yards, 1 TD

Cook ran for 1,691 yards last season despite struggling with injuries that caused him to miss most of two games. If FSU is going to unseat Clemson in the ACC and return to the playoff, Cook will have to be the catalyst.

POSITION AWARDS

DAVEY O'BRIEN: TOP QB
Deshaun Watson
Clemson
Baker Mayfield
Oklahoma
J.T. Barrett
Ohio State

DOAK WALKER: TOP RB
Christian McCaffrey
Stanford
Leonard Fournette
LSU
Dalvin Cook
Florida State

BILETNIKOFF: TOP WR
JuJu Smith-Schuster
USC
Calvin Ridley
Alabama
Mike Williams
Clemson

NAGURSKI / BEDNARIK: TOP DEFENDER
DE **Myles Garrett**
Texas A&M
LB **Raekwon McMillan**
Ohio State
LB **Jabrill Peppers**
Michigan

LOMBARDI AWARD: TOP LB/ LINEMAN
DE **Myles Garrett**
Texas A&M
DE **Derek Barnett**
Tennessee
OT **Zach Banner**
USC

ILLUSTRATION PHOTO REFERENCE: MIKE EHRMANN/GETTY IMAGES

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL HOEWELER

SPECIAL OLYMPICS
UNIFIED SPORTS
RIVALRY SERIES

TACKLE INTOLERANCE BY SUPPORTING YOUR ALMA MATER

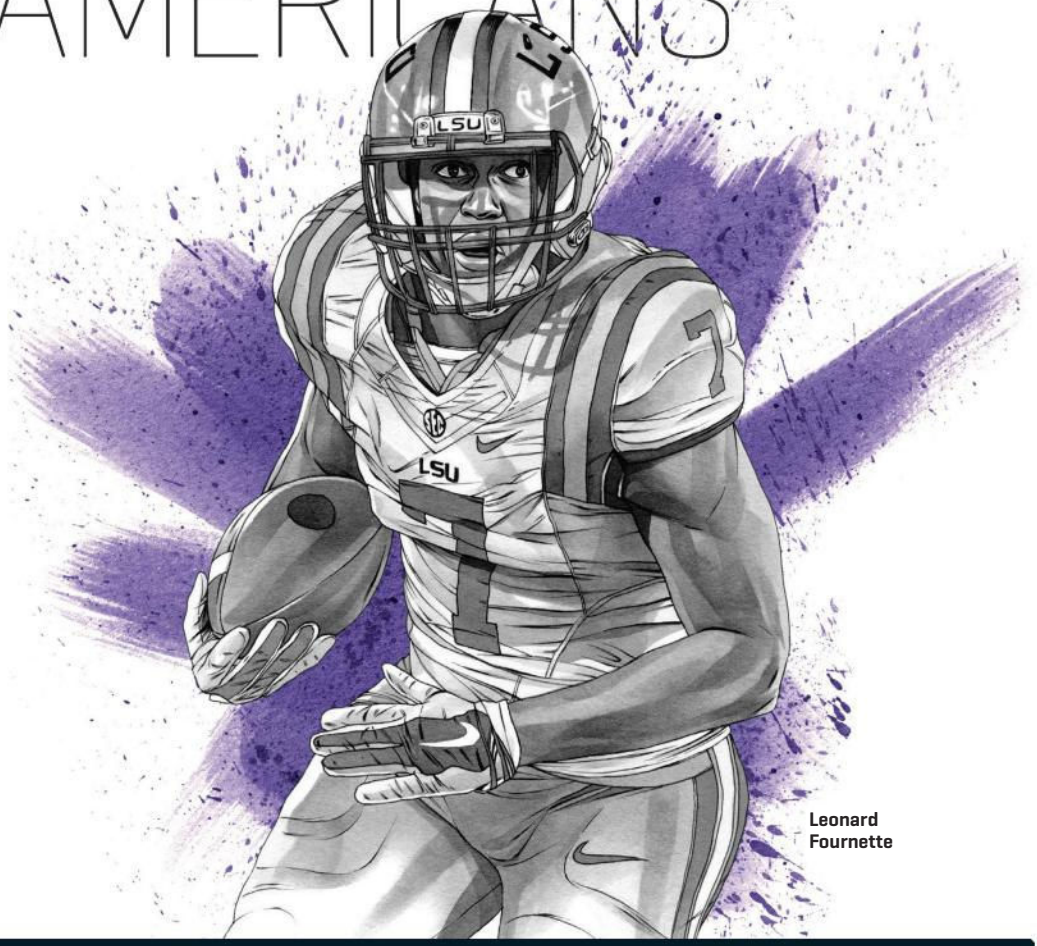
IN THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED SPORTS RIVALRY SERIES!

Visit playunified.org for more info

ESPN | Special Olympics Unified Sports®

GLOBAL PRESENTING SPONSOR OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS UNIFIED SPORTS

PRESEASON ALL-AMERICANS



Leonard Fournette

The SEC is once again king—Alabama's 2015 national title was the league's eighth in 10 seasons—but it can surely see a challenger coming in its rearview mirror. The Big Ten boasts more of my All-Americans (eight) than any other conference.

BY MARK SCHLABACH

OFFENSE

QB **Deshaun Watson**, Jr., Clemson
RB **Leonard Fournette**, Jr., LSU
RB **Dalvin Cook**, Jr., Florida State
WR **JuJu Smith-Schuster**, Jr., USC
Smith-Schuster lit up secondaries in his first two years, including 1,454 yards in 2015, third most in USC history.
WR **Calvin Ridley**, So., Alabama
Ridley set a Crimson Tide freshman record with 1,045 receiving yards on 89 catches with seven touchdowns.
TE **Jake Butt**, Sr., Michigan
The Wolverines' NFL-ready receiver passed up the draft after catching 51 balls in Jim Harbaugh's offense.
C **Kyle Fuller**, Sr., Baylor
After 26 consecutive starts on a dominant line, Fuller will have four new starters alongside him this season.
T **Zach Banner**, Sr., USC
T **Roderick Johnson**, Jr., Florida State
Johnson won the ACC's Jacobs Blocking Trophy in Dalvin Cook's school-record 1,691-yard season in 2015.
G **Pat Elflein**, Sr., Ohio State
G **Dan Feeney**, Sr., Indiana
Feeney is so dominant he didn't give up a sack on 475 pass plays in 2015 and has allowed only one in 37 starts.

DEFENSE

DE **Myles Garrett**, Jr., Texas A&M
Warning to QBs: Garrett said his 12½ sacks and 19½ tackles for loss in 2015 added up to a "sophomore slump."
DE **Jonathan Allen**, Sr., Alabama
DT **Malik McDowell**, Jr., Michigan State
McDowell (6-6, 275) has the size and strength to play in the middle of the line and the speed to play on the edge.
LB **Jabrill Peppers**, Jr., Michigan
Peppers started 12 games at DB, played a little offense, returned punts and kickoffs in 2015 and now moves to LB.
LB **Ben Boulware**, Sr., Clemson
LB **Raekwon McMillan**, Jr., Ohio State
McMillan led OSU with 119 tackles in 2015. This season he'll be the unquestioned leader of the defense.
LB **Reuben Foster**, Sr., Alabama
The Alabama player with the Auburn tattoo was second in tackles for the Tide last season with 73.
CB **Desmond King**, Sr., Iowa
CB **Jourdan Lewis**, Sr., Michigan
S **Derwin James**, So., Florida State
S **Jamal Adams**, Jr., LSU
At 6-1, 211, and with 60 tackles and 4 INTs in 2015, Adams is bigger, and maybe better, than Tyrann Mathieu.

SPECIAL TEAMS

K **Andy Phillips**, Sr., Utah
The former U.S. ski team Alpine racer has made 84 percent of his field goals, including a perfect 4-for-4 on kicks of 50 yards or longer.
P **Hayden Hunt**, Sr., Colorado State
KR **Adoree' Jackson**, Jr., USC
The Trojans' do-it-all star was excused from spring practice to focus on trying to qualify for the 2016 Olympics as a long jumper.
AP **Christian McCaffrey**, Jr., Stanford

ILLUSTRATION PHOTO REFERENCE: JOHN KORDUNER/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL HOEWELER

UNIT RANKINGS

Trench warfare: Welsh, Boettger and Myers lead Iowa's O-line.

When we asked ESPN experts to rank the nation's position groups, it came as no surprise that Alabama grabbed three mentions. But Iowa took home the best Big Ugly unit, and that front line might be the unsung piece that pushes the Hawkeyes to the next level in '16.

BROCK HUARD

SKILL PLAYERS

1 **CLEMSON**
Deshaun Watson QB
Wayne Gallman RB
Artavis Scott WR

2 **OKLAHOMA**
Baker Mayfield QB
Samaje Perine RB
Dede Westbrook WR

3 **HOUSTON**
Greg Ward Jr. QB
Duke Catalon RB
Steven Dunbar WR

4 **OLE MISS**
Chad Kelly QB
Jordan Wilkins RB
Evan Engram TE

5 **WASHINGTON STATE**
Luke Falk QB
Gerard Wicks RB
Gabe Marks WR

The explosive arm of Kelly (87.0 QBR) will light up the Grove, and Damore'ea Stringfellow helps replace Laquon Treadwell at receiver. The Rebels put up north of 40 points per game, eighth in the FBS.

ED CUNNINGHAM

OFFENSIVE LINE

1 **IOWA**
Boone Myers LG
Ike Boettger RT
Sean Welsh C/RG

2 **ALABAMA**
Cam Robinson LT
Ross Pierschbacher C
Alphonse Taylor RG

3 **FLORIDA STATE**
Rod Johnson LT
Alec Eberle C
Wilson Bell RG

4 **CLEMSON**
Mitch Hyatt LT
Jay Guillermo C
Tyrone Crowder RG

5 **BOISE STATE**
Steven Baggett RG
Travis Averill LG
Mario Yakoo RT

Iowa will miss center Austin Blythe, but Myers, Boettger, Welsh and Cole Croston have combined for 51 career starts and weigh in at an average of 302 pounds, helping keep QB C.J. Beathard upright.

BOOGER McFARLAND

FRONT SEVEN

1 **FLORIDA**
Caleb Brantley DT
Cece Jefferson DE
Jarrad Davis LB

2 **LSU**
Davon Godchaux DT
Arden Key LB/DE
Kendell Beckwith LB

3 **ALABAMA**
Jonathan Allen DE
Reuben Foster LB
Tim Williams LB

4 **OHIO STATE**
Sam Hubbard DE
Raekwon McMillan LB
Tracy Sprinkle DT

5 **MICHIGAN STATE**
Malik McDowell DT
Ed Davis LB
Riley Bullough LB

The Tigers switch to a 3-4 defense, allowing Key to stand up and rush off the edge at outside linebacker, and Godchaux will create havoc inside. Expect the sack total (34) to jump in a heavier attack scheme.

ROD GILMORE

DEFENSIVE BACKS

1 **MICHIGAN**
Jabrill Peppers S/LB
Jourdan Lewis CB
Jeremy Clark CB

2 **GEORGIA**
Aaron Davis CB
Malkom Parrish CB
Dominick Sanders S

3 **BOSTON COLLEGE**
Isaac Yiadom CB
John Johnson S
William Harris S

4 **WASHINGTON**
Budda Baker S
Sidney Jones CB
Kevin King CB

5 **OKLAHOMA**
Jordan Thomas CB
Steven Parker S
Ahmad Thomas S

Edging LSU for the final spot, OU faced a heavy workload (437 attempts), made 20 picks and kept opponents to just 6.0 yards per attempt (13th in the FBS). Three starters return in the secondary.

DESMOND HOWARD

SPECIAL TEAMS

1 **TENNESSEE**
Evan Berry KR
Cameron Sutton PR
Aaron Medley K

2 **UTAH**
Andy Phillips K
Cory Butler-Byrd KR
Boobie Hobbs PR

3 **TEXAS A&M**
Christian Kirk RS
Daniel LaCamera K
Shane Tripucka P

4 **ALABAMA**
Damien Harris KR
Adam Griffith K
JK Scott P

5 **STANFORD**
Christian McCaffrey RS
Conrad Ukropina K
Alex Robinson P

Utah's crew comes in ranked fourth in efficiency. "Automatic" Andy has hit 84 percent on field goals (4-for-4 from 50-plus) over three years, and Butler-Byrd has wheels (27.9 yards per return).

ILLUSTRATION PHOTO REFERENCE FROM LEFT: JEFF LEWIS/AP IMAGES; JEFF HANISCH/USA TODAY SPORTS; SCOTT BOEHM/AP IMAGES

RUNNING BACKS ARE BACK

Christian McCaffrey and a wave of rushers are crashing college football's quarterback party.

BY RYAN McGEE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAYMON GARDNER

Carried away

A class of super sophomore rushers ran wild in 2015, with Leonard Fournette (LSU), Dalvin Cook (Florida State), Christian McCaffrey (Stanford) and Royce Freeman (Oregon) shouldering more than their share.

Percent of team's 2015 offense	
Leonard Fournette	37%*
Christian McCaffrey	34%
Dalvin Cook	31%
Royce Freeman	26%

Percent of team's total TDs	
Leonard Fournette	45%*
Dalvin Cook	38%
Royce Freeman	27%
Christian McCaffrey	25%

*Highest among Power 5 running backs

Two elderly men sit on a bench outside Stanford's practice field, staring silently at a cardinal-colored nylon curtain covering a fence. After 20 minutes, one finally speaks over the shouting, clacking and blaring of Drake and Future's "Jumpman" coming from beyond the screen.

"Behind that wall is either a football practice or a monster truck show," he declares.

"Actually," his pal replies, "it's probably both."

Barely hidden by the curtain, the Cardinal are busy grinding toward the 2016 season, toward defending their Pac-12 title and competing for a playoff bid, towed there by running back Christian McCaffrey, the Heisman Trophy runner-up and new NCAA record holder for all-purpose yardage in a season (3,864).

Unlike with most Power 5 programs, McCaffrey and Stanford work in public, on practice fields as out in the open as Hoover Tower or the Oval. The team stretches and drills where every meandering professor or cycling student can see. Even when the Cardinal move behind the security fence for high-level tinkering, it's not hard to find a knothole gap for a sneak peek of the football laboratory.

"I'm not sure what they think they're hiding," says Old Guy No. 1.

"Yeah, I already got their playbook down," Old Guy No. 2 replies, raising his fists. "Running backs right … running backs left … throw it if we need to. Repeat."

He doesn't just have Stanford's playbook. He might very well have the game plan for December's playoff field. After a breakneck decade of spreading and slinging and trickeration, the running back is back.

"It's a great time to be playing football," says McCaffrey, a junior who totaled 437 touches in 2015—rushing, receiving, returning and even throwing three passes (two for TDs). "There's a lot of creativity in the game. I know we're Stanford and known for pounding the ball, but that definition isn't what it used to be. You have to do a lot of different things now, especially as a running back. It's fun."

AFTER MORE THAN a decade of riding shotgun, running backs are reclaiming their turf one carry at a time. Three of the teams projected to still be in the College Football Playoff title hunt in six months are powered by elite runners: Oklahoma (Samaje Perine), Florida State (Dalvin Cook) and LSU (Leonard Fournette.) They head a growing list of runners expected to dominate the invitation list to December's Heisman ceremony as well as the front end of next year's NFL draft.

This is on the heels of McCaffrey's losing the 2015 award to Alabama's Derrick Henry, just the third runner this century to win the bronzed prize. Last year was the first time backs finished 1-2 in Heisman voting since 2009 and only the second time since 1994. What's more, five of the top eight finalists were runners. This season three return—McCaffrey, Cook and Fournette—and they'll be challenged by other elite backs, from OU's Perine and Oregon's Royce Freeman to UNC's Elijah Hood and Georgia's duo of Nick Chubb and Sony Michel.

Even programs that have pushed the passing envelope for a decade must now admit that there's a ceiling up there in the air. You want proof? Go check out the number of pass-heavy teams engraved on the BCS or College Football Playoff trophies. We'll wait. The road to No. 1 always travels right down the middle, with the trophy tucked firmly in the elbow of a tailback.

"When I was with the Raiders, my boss Jon Gruden would say the same thing all the time," explains Stanford head coach David Shaw, who learned the game at the feet of everyone from Dennis Green and Bill Walsh as a player to Gruden, Brian Billick and Jim Harbaugh as an assistant. "What you want to do on offense is present the illusion of sophistication but all in all remain very basic. You throw stuff at the defense, different formations, but then run a regular play that we just want to execute the right way. What does it take to execute the right way? That answer has always been the same. A smart quarterback and a great running back."

Shaw pauses, perhaps reflecting on the fact that he still hasn't chosen a QB to replace the beloved Kevin Hogan. "And if your quarterback still needs time to figure just how smart he can be, your best friend will always be a runner who can take care

Heisman helpfuls

Dalvin Cook, Leonard Fournette, Christian McCaffrey and Royce Freeman couldn't run to glory, or anywhere, without these guys.

LT Roderick Johnson
FLORIDA STATE

He won the Jacobs Blocking Trophy as the ACC's top OL.

C Ethan Pocic
LSU

His 128.5 knockdowns is the most by an LSU lineman since 2010.

RT Casey Tucker
STANFORD

McCaffrey gained 5-plus yards on 49.4 percent of runs off RT.

RT Tyrell Crosby*
OREGON

Freeman's 7.5 ypc on outside runs off RT topped all Power 5 RBs.**

*Moves to left tackle in 2016
**Minimum 40 carries

FROM LEFT: FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY; STEVE FRANZ/LSU ATHLETICS; CASEY VALENTINE/ISI PHOTOS; UNIVERSITY OF OREGON OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Stanford doesn't exactly hide its intent to run you into the ground with a heavy dose of McCaffrey.

of things while you sort it out."

That's what Ezekiel Elliott was asked to do while Urban Meyer sifted through injured QBs in 2014—and he ran Ohio State all the way to a national championship. That's what Henry was asked to do as Nick Saban and offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin ramped Jake Coker up to speed, an approach that's become the business model at Bama (see: Mark Ingram/Greg McElroy '09 and Trent Richardson/AJ McCarron '11) and has resulted in four national titles.

So that's what will also be asked of McCaffrey and other backs during a fall that features a remarkable number of contenders saddled with big questions at quarterback. As stressful as that might be for college coaches in the short term, it already has NFL types wiping away drool thinking about drafts of the future.

Teams have praised Elliott, who was taken with the fourth pick of the draft. Elliott followed in the footsteps of Georgia's Todd Gurley, whom the Rams took 10th overall last year, the first back taken in the first round since 2012. He responded by bringing the Rams just their second NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year Award since they drafted Jerome Bettis out of Notre Dame the year before Gurley was born.

"I think running backs are coming out of college with an expanded knowledge of the game that they simply didn't have before," explains Saban, who coached two of the seven first-round backs selected since 2011. "Even at places like Alabama or Stanford where we might be labeled as 'traditional' or 'pro style,' whatever you want to call it, we are always probing. We are always adding wrinkles. So as a result we are asking running backs to do more and process more and be more multidimensional all of the time. They are becoming like second quarterbacks on the field.

"But," he adds rather sharply, "it has to be the right kid to handle all of that. I can ask anybody to do this stuff. That doesn't mean they can."

BACK ON THE FARM, Shaw and McCaffrey emerge from behind the practice field fence. The two old men are long gone. The player politely takes selfies with a waiting family, while the coach stops to chat with a couple of reporters.

He's immediately hit with a "2016: Comeback of the Running Back" question. With Drake and Future turned down, he accidentally (maybe) assumes the old-school role of LL Cool J.

"I always like to see what kind of a label people come up with for a season," Shaw says. "Yeah, other places might plan to use backs more, but when they hit October and times get tough, they'll go back to doing what they do. And we'll still do what we do. I wouldn't call it a comeback. Not here at Stanford. That's how we've been here for years."

TOP 25

WAY-TOO-EARLY

The Football Power Index likes LSU, but Nick Saban gets the benefit of my doubt. The Tide are ready to roll again.

BY MARK SCHLABACH

1 ALABAMA
Yes, the Crimson Tide will have to break in another new quarterback, and yes, they'll miss Heisman winner Derrick Henry. But Nick Saban continues to churn out wins (and NFL players), and this coming season won't be an exception.

2 CLEMSON
With quarterback Deshaun Watson returning, the Tigers have a shot to repeat as ACC champs. But Clemson will have to replace a lot of muscle from its stingy defense, including pass-rushing specialists Kevin Dodd (12 sacks) and Shaq Lawson (12½).

3 MICHIGAN
In only one season, coach Jim Harbaugh has transformed his alma mater into a CFP contender. Michigan doubled its victory total in Harbaugh's first year, and now he has his sights set on eclipsing Michigan State and Ohio State in the Big Ten.

4 FLORIDA STATE
Jimbo Fisher will have an interesting QB battle on his hands, but everybody else is back on offense, including Dalvin Cook. If FSU defeats Clemson on Oct. 29, it will have the inside track on a fourth ACC title in five seasons.

5 OKLAHOMA
The Sooners' trip to the playoff came a year early probably thanks to the additions of OC Lincoln Riley and transfer QB Baker Mayfield. If Oklahoma reloads at linebacker and receiver—typically not a problem for Bob Stoops—it could return.

6 LSU
If the Tigers can find some help for star tailback Leonard Fournette, they might be talented enough to unseat Alabama in the rugged SEC West. But without a better passing game, LSU will be a long shot to roll the toughest schedule in the nation.

7 BAYLOR
The Bears led the FBS in scoring (48.1 ppg) despite playing much of last season without their top two QBs. Seth Russell (neck) and Jarrett Stidham (ankle) return from injuries, but Baylor will have to replace all but one starter on both lines.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL HOEWELER

8 STANFORD
Christian McCaffrey will have us watching #Pac12AfterDark this season, but the Cardinal have to replace Kevin Hogan's school-record 36 victories at QB. A brutal road schedule includes games at UCLA, Washington, Notre Dame and Oregon.

9 NOTRE DAME
The Fighting Irish fought through an injury-plagued season, which might pay dividends this fall. Which QB will Brian Kelly choose, Malik Zaire or DeShone Kizer? And will he hand off to Tarean Folston or Josh Adams?

10 OHIO STATE
Urban Meyer is calling this the "Year of Development." Catchy, right? The Buckeyes better develop quickly after nine underclassmen left early for the NFL, including four first-rounders: DE Joey Bosa, RB Ezekiel Elliott, CB Eli Apple and LB Darron Lee.

11 TENNESSEE
12 USC
13 GEORGIA
14 OLE MISS
15 OKLAHOMA STATE
16 MICHIGAN STATE
17 WASHINGTON
18 HOUSTON
19 NORTH CAROLINA
20 OREGON
21 TEXAS A&M
22 UCLA
23 IOWA
24 MIAMI
25 LOUISVILLE

BRAD EDWARDS' PLAYOFF FORECAST

1 OKLAHOMA — **2 LSU**

FIESTA BOWL
GLENDALE, ARIZ.
12.31.2016

CHICK-FIL-A PEACH BOWL
ATLANTA
12.31.2016

4 WASHINGTON — **3 CLEMSON**

CFP NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP
CLEMSON OVER OKLAHOMA
TAMPA, FLA.
01.09.2017

This season lacks a clear playoff favorite, so I'm going with QB experience. Oklahoma seems an easy pick to win the Big 12 again, while fellow 2015 semifinalist Clemson has a friendly slate aside from a trip to Tallahassee. I'll roll the dice on LSU—it gets Bama and Ole Miss at home. And in the wide-open West, emerging Washington could surprise. This time, Clemson takes home the trophy.

GOODYEAR COTTON BOWL CLASSIC
HOUSTON VS. NOTRE DAME
ARLINGTON, TEXAS
01.02.2017

CAPITAL ONE ORANGE BOWL
FLORIDA STATE VS. ALABAMA
MIAMI
12.30.2016

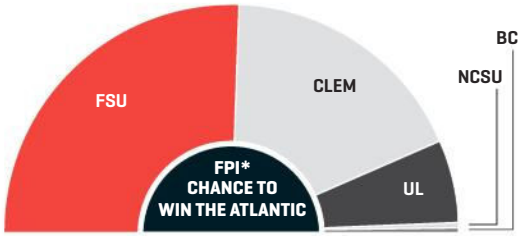
ROSE BOWL GAME PRESENTED BY NORTHWESTERN MUTUAL
MICHIGAN VS. USC
PASADENA, CALIF.
01.02.2017

ALLSTATE SUGAR BOWL
TENNESSEE VS. TCU
NEW ORLEANS
01.02.2017

ACC

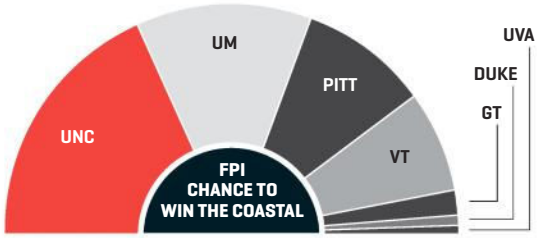
ACC outlook

ATLANTIC	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
FLORIDA STATE	2	51.6%
CLEMSON	4	37.9%
LOUISVILLE	12	10.2%
NC STATE	42	0.2%
BOSTON COLLEGE	51	0.1%
WAKE FOREST	58	0.0%
SYRACUSE	61	0.0%



*The Football Power Index is a predictive measure of team strength that represents how many points a team is above or below average. Division and conference projections are based on 10,000 simulations of each team's schedule, using FPI.

COASTAL	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
NORTH CAROLINA	20	36.5%
MIAMI (FLA.)	26	24.8%
PITTSBURGH	30	18.6%
VIRGINIA TECH	40	14.1%
GEORGIA TECH	46	3.3%
DUKE	56	1.7%
VIRGINIA	64	1.1%



AVERAGE FPI RANK

36.6

PROJECTED CHAMPION

44%

FLORIDA STATE

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB	**Deshaun Watson**	Jr.	Clemson

ALL-ACC

QB	**Deshaun Watson**	Jr.	Clemson
RB	**Dalvin Cook**	Jr.	Florida State
RB	**Elijah Hood**	Jr.	North Carolina
WR	**Isaiah Ford**	Jr.	Virginia Tech
WR	**Mike Williams**	Sr.	Clemson
TE	**Jordan Leggett**	Sr.	Clemson
OL	**Jay Guillermo**	Sr.	Clemson
OL	**Roderick Johnson**	Jr.	Florida State
OL	**Mitch Hyatt**	So.	Clemson
OL	**Dorian Johnson**	Sr.	Pittsburgh
OL	**Caleb Peterson**	Sr.	North Carolina

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

S	**Derwin James**	So.	Florida State

ALL-ACC

DE	**DeMarcus Walker**	Sr.	Florida State
DE	**Ejuan Price**	Sr.	Pittsburgh
DL	**Christian Wilkins**	So.	Clemson
DT	**DeAngelo Brown**	Sr.	Louisville
LB	**Ben Boulware**	Sr.	Clemson
LB	**Devonte Fields**	Sr.	Louisville
LB	**Matt Milano**	Sr.	Boston College
CB	**Marquez White**	Sr.	Florida State
CB	**Cordrea Tankersley**	Sr.	Clemson
S	**Derwin James**	So.	Florida State
S	**Quin Blanding**	Jr.	Virginia

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Nick Weiler**	Sr.	North Carolina
P	**Nicholas Conte**	Sr.	Virginia
RS	**DeVon Edwards**	Sr.	Duke

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER

- **9/3** Clemson @ Auburn (91*)
- **9/5** Florida State vs. Ole Miss (96)
- **9/17** Florida State @ Louisville (96)

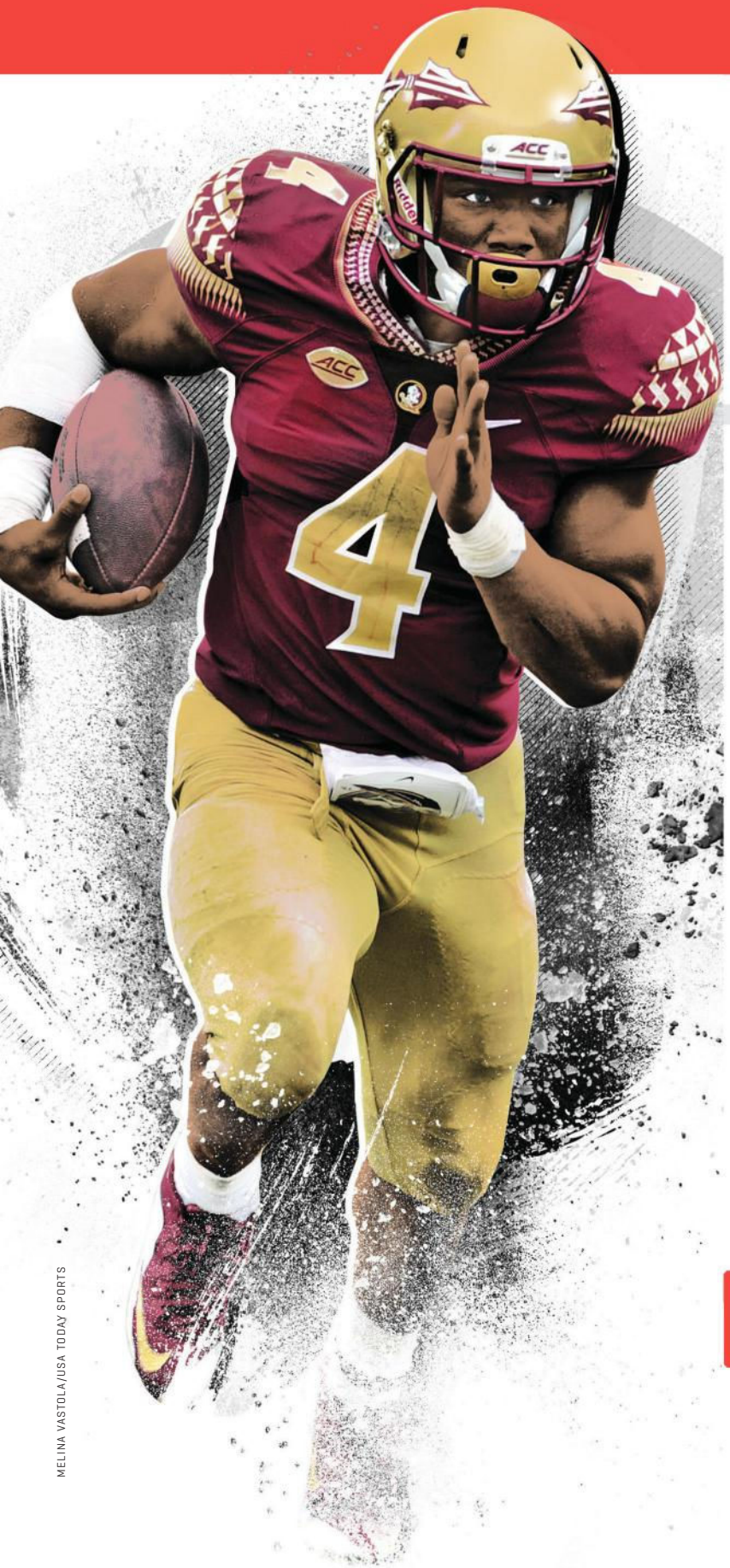
OCTOBER

- **10/1** Louisville @ Clemson (89)
- **10/8** Florida State @ Miami (Fla.) (90)
- **10/29** Clemson @ Florida State (98)

NOVEMBER

- **11/5** Florida State @ NC State (84)
- **11/12** Pittsburgh @ Clemson (83)
- **11/26** Florida @ Florida State (86)

*Matchup quality (0-100 scale) rates games based on team strength (FPI) and how close the contest is expected to be.



MELINA VASTOLA/USA TODAY SPORTS

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

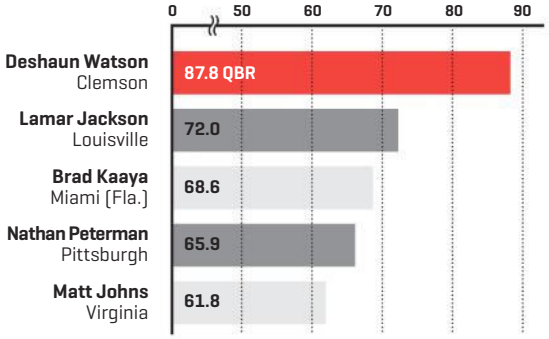
Even with two top-five FPI heavyweights, the ACC ranks third in average SOS.

33

AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

It's Deshaun Watson and ... everyone else. The Clemson QB's 87.8 QBR was No. 2 in the FBS in 2015 and tops all returners.



Dalvin Cook

Forget Fournette—Cook is the game's most explosive back. Ask the defenses the FSU junior burned for 22 runs of 20-plus yards, the most in the Power 5.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Florida State

COACH Jimbo Fisher (7th season)
68–14 (4–2 in bowl games)

The Seminoles should be in the College Football Playoff mix again, with 11 starters back on offense, including, most critically, dynamic rusher Dalvin Cook, who broke the program's single-season rushing record last year. If Florida State can find some consistency at quarterback and build depth at linebacker, another ACC title could be in its grasp. —Andrea Adelson

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl vs. Houston, 38-24 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Everett Golson: 1,778 yards
RUSHING **Dalvin Cook: 1,691 yards**
RECEIVING **Travis Rudolph: 916 yards**
TACKLES Reggie Northrup: 94
SACKS **DeMarcus Walker: 10½**
INTERCEPTIONS Lamarcus Brutus: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Dalvin Cook
Cook's accomplishments in his sophomore season make for quite a list: No. 6 in the nation with 1,691 rush yards; No. 8 with 19 rush TDs; tops in the Power 5 with 7.38 yards per carry (minimum 100 rushes); a unanimous All-ACC pick by the media. In all, Cook was the only player to rank top 10 in the nation in yards per carry, rush yards per game, all-purpose yards, total rush yards, rush touchdowns and scoring. Even more amazing? FSU coach Jimbo Fisher says Cook looks better this offseason than he ever has.

X-FACTOR LB Matthew Thomas
Way back in 2013, Thomas was the No. 6 player in the ESPN 300 and considered one to watch at Florida State. Now, after limited contributions in his first three seasons because of injuries and suspensions (NCAA rules violations), Thomas might finally make a major impact. He needs to, considering the Noles' major needs at linebacker, where they are down two key contributors and face depth concerns for a second straight year.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Sean Maguire, who replaced an ineffective Everett Golson last year, missed the spring with an ankle injury and isn't assured the No. 1 spot this fall. The majority of spring reps went to J.J. Cosentino (like Maguire a prototypical dropback passer) and dual-threat candidates Deondre Francois and Malik Henry. Redshirt freshman Francois, who spent last season learning the system, is the favorite to win the starting job.

THE PRESSER

For the first time since 2012, FSU didn't have a 1,000-yard receiver, and its 7.94 ypa was its lowest since 2010. Those poor showings were due in part to the squad's struggles at QB, not to mention the loss of some of the nation's best receivers to the NFL. This year's corps is not much more imposing. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE NEED TO IMPROVE THE PASSING GAME?** "They're so big up front and can mash you, but I wonder if they will cut it loose. How good can they be? That style of offense allows you to stay in the game if you can bring down the run game." —ACC defensive coach

Cook was one of the best running backs in the country a year ago and will go into the season generating plenty of Heisman hype. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SLOWING DOWN A COOK-LED ATTACK?** "You have to disguise what you're doing so they can't get a bead on you, but you've got to mix coverages, your fronts and your pressures. With everything you do, you have to make sure you're outnumbering the box." —ACC head coach

The Florida State defensive line was much improved in 2015, with DeMarcus Walker (10½ sacks) leading the way. He returns, along with two other starters. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPROVING DEFENSE?** "They are getting back to the kind of defensive line that Florida State has traditionally had every year. They're a little more athletic than they've been the last few years, especially at defensive end, and they have more experience returning." —ACC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Deondre Francois**	RFr.	6-1	214 ●
RB	**Dalvin Cook**	Jr.	5-11	206 ●
WR	**Kermit Whitfield**	Sr.	5-8	180 ●
WR	**Travis Rudolph**	Jr.	6-1	189 ●
WR	**George Campbell**	So.	6-4	192 ●
TE	**Ryan Izzo**	So.	6-5	243 ●
C	**Alec Eberle**	So.	6-4	287 ●
RG	**Wilson Bell**	Jr.	6-5	313 ●
LG	**Kareem Are**	Sr.	6-6	334 ●
RT	**Brock Ruble**	So.	6-8	293 ●
LT	**Roderick Johnson**	Jr.	6-7	307 ●
K	**Ricky Aguayo**	Fr.	6-1	198
DEFENSE				
DE	**DeMarcus Walker**	Sr.	6-3	281 ●
NG	**Derrick Nnadi**	Jr.	6-1	303 ●
DT	**Demarcus Christmas**	So.	6-4	290
DE	**Josh Sweat**	So.	6-5	236 ●
LB	**Jacob Pugh**	Jr.	6-4	232
LB	**Ro'Derrick Hoskins**	Jr.	6-2	245 ●
LB	**Trey Marshall**	Jr.	6-0	209
CB	**Tarvarus McFadden**	So.	6-2	201
CB	**Marquez White**	Sr.	6-0	181 ●
SS	**Derwin James**	So.	6-3	213 ●
FS	**Nate Andrews**	Sr.	6-0	210
P	**Logan Tyler**	Fr.	6-0	195

4 Walker forced four fumbles last year, tied for most in the conference.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.6 ● FPI CHANCE FLORIDA STATE WINS

9/5 vs. Ole Miss (Orlando) **71%** ● **9/10** vs. Charleston Southern **99%** ● **9/17** @ Louisville **69%**
9/24 @ South Florida **89%** ● **10/1** vs. North Carolina **86%** ● **10/8** @ Miami (Fla.) **79%**
10/15 vs. Wake Forest **96%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Clemson **64%** ● **11/5** @ NC State **88%**
11/11 vs. Boston College **96%** ● **11/19** @ Syracuse **93%** ● **11/26** vs. Florida **86%**

2 Clemson

COACH Dabo Swinney (9th season)
75–27 (5–4 in bowl games)

Preseason expectations are at an all-time high for the Tigers after their narrow loss in the national title game. Heisman finalist Deshaun Watson returns along with seven other starters on offense, but whether the Tigers repeat as Atlantic champs or make it back to the College Football Playoff depends on the defense, which must replace seven starters. —A.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 14–1 (8–0)
BOWL GAME CFP National Championship Game Presented by AT&T vs. Alabama, 45-40 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Deshaun Watson: 4,104 yards**
RUSHING **Wayne Gallman: 1,527 yards**
RECEIVING **Artavis Scott: 901 yards**
TACKLES B.J. Goodson: 108
SACKS Shaq Lawson: 12½
INTERCEPTIONS **Cordrea Tankersley: 5**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Deshaun Watson
The 2015 Heisman finalist can do it all: He amassed 5,209 yards of total offense (becoming the first player in FBS history with 4,000 yards passing and 1,000 yards rushing in a season) just a year after an ACL injury. Late in the season, he showed how effective he can be in the run game, finishing with three 100-yard rushing performances in his final four games. He also had a hand in 478 of Clemson's 550 yards in the national championship game, carrying the then-undefeated Tigers to within points of a title.

X-FACTOR DE Austin Bryant
The sophomore is penciled in to take over at one of the vacant defensive end spots, which has recently featured standouts Vic Beasley, Shaq Lawson and Kevin Dodd. Bryant (6-4, 265 pounds) is similar in size to Lawson and Dodd, who combined for 49 TFLs a season ago (ranking No. 3 and No. 5 in the nation). Given the production at this position over the past three seasons, Bryant's improvement from 2015—23 tackles, 2½ for loss, in 13 games—will be crucial for this defense to remain a top-10 unit.

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
B.J. Goodson, a senior who led the team with 108 tackles last season, is gone, leaving a huge hole in the heart of the defense. Sophomore Kendall Joseph (six career tackles) leads the competition to replace him, with early-enrollee freshmen Shaq Smith and Tre Lamar, both ESPN 300 recruits, also in the mix.

THE PRESSER

The Tigers led the ACC with 514.5 yards per game last year, and Clemson returns its ACC POY QB, its leading rusher and wide receiver, and its most talented receiver, Mike Williams, who missed most of 2015 with a neck injury. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SLOWING DOWN THIS OFFENSE?** "They're the most talented team in the ACC, so we've got to be smarter than they are, and we've got to outscheme them. And you've got to win the special-teams game—because you hope they're such prima donnas that they don't want to do special teams." —ACC head coach

Defensive coordinator Brent Venables replaced seven starters last season, and Clemson still ranked No. 10 in total D. This season Venables has yet another seven starters—six of whom had eligibility remaining—to replace. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DIFFICULTY OF REPLACING SO MANY STARTERS SO QUICKLY?** "When guys leave early, that makes it a little tougher. It's the second year in a row, so now you're down to your third group. Let's see how they do, because I think it will be tougher for them." —ACC defensive coach

Venables' aggressive scheme delivered a nation-best 126 TFLs and 48 sacks, second in the country. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO COUNTERATTACK THAT SCHEME?** "Run draws and quick three-step drops so you don't have to worry about pressure. RTP: refuse to participate. If they're blitzing up the A-gaps, then I'm not running there. I'm running power read and option, running stretch to take advantage." —ACC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Deshaun Watson**	Jr.	6-2	210	●
RB	**Wayne Gallman**	Jr.	6-1	215	●
WR	**Hunter Renfrow**	So.	5-10	175	●
WR	**Artavis Scott**	Jr.	5-11	190	●
WR	**Mike Williams**	Sr.	6-4	220	
TE	**Jordan Leggett**	Sr.	6-5	255	●
C	**Jay Guillermo**	Sr.	6-3	310	●
RG	**Tyrone Crowder**	Jr.	6-2	325	●
LG	**Taylor Hearn**	So.	6-5	324	
RT	**Jake Fruhmorgen**	So.	6-6	292	
LT	**Mitch Hyatt**	So.	6-5	295	●
K	**Greg Huegel**	So.	5-11	185	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Austin Bryant**	So.	6-4	265	
DT	**Dexter Lawrence**	Fr.	6-5	340	●
DT	**Carlos Watkins**	Sr.	6-3	300	●
DE	**Christian Wilkins**	So.	6-4	315	
LB	**Ben Boulware**	Sr.	5-11	240	●
LB	**Kendall Joseph**	So.	6-0	230	
NB	**Dorian O'Daniel**	Jr.	6-1	215	
CB	**Cordrea Tankersley**	Sr.	6-1	195	●
CB	**Mark Fields**	So.	5-10	195	
SS	**Jadar Johnson**	Sr.	6-1	205	
FS	**Van Smith**	So.	6-0	190	
P	**Andy Teasdall**	Sr.	5-11	190	●

80

Gallman led the ACC last season in third-down rush conversion percentage (80).

STREETER LECKA/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.5 ● **FPI CHANCE CLEMSON WINS**

9/3 @ Auburn **73%** ● **9/10** vs. Troy **99%** ● **9/17** vs. South Carolina State **99%**
9/22 @ Georgia Tech **88%** ● **10/1** vs. Louisville **79%** ● **10/7** @ Boston College **88%**
10/15 vs. NC State **92%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** @ Florida State **37%** ● **11/5** vs. Syracuse **95%**
11/12 vs. Pittsburgh **87%** ● **11/19** @ Wake Forest **91%** ● **11/26** vs. South Carolina **91%**

3 Louisville

COACH Bobby Petrino (3rd season)
17–9 (1–1 in bowl games)

After an abysmal 2-4 start, the Cards won six of their final seven games, including a Music City Bowl win over Texas A&M. That late-season success should carry over this fall, as Louisville returns 17 starters, tied for the most in the AAC. But in an Atlantic Division stacked with the likes of Clemson and Florida State, a 10-win season might be good enough for only third place. —A.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (5–3)
BOWL GAME Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl vs. Texas A&M, 27-21 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Lamar Jackson: 1,840 yards**
RUSHING **Lamar Jackson: 960 yards**
RECEIVING **Jamari Staples: 638 yards**
TACKLES **Keith Kelsey: 107**
SACKS **Devonte Fields: 10½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Trumaine Washington: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Lamar Jackson
His bowl performance against Texas A&M—he threw for 227 yards and ran for 226 more in the 27-21 win—sent expectations for 2016 soaring. Before that game, Jackson threw for 12 TDs and averaged more than 150 passing yards as he split time (and starts) with then-sophomore Kyle Bolin. Now entering his sophomore year, Jackson appears entrenched as the starter—and that gives Louisville stability at quarterback heading into a season for the first time since Bobby Petrino returned as coach.

X-FACTOR WR Jamari Staples
In his first season at Louisville after transferring from UAB (where he had five touchdowns and almost 650 yards in his freshman and sophomore seasons), Staples led the Cardinals with 638 yards and 17.2 yards per catch—fourth in the ACC—despite missing the first four games with a knee injury. But he flashed the potential to give Petrino his first 1,000-yard receiver since Jarius Wright at Arkansas in 2011.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive end
Senior Sheldon Rankins is off to the NFL, and he leaves the biggest hole to fill on the Louisville defense. He started all 26 games the past two seasons, and there's not much game experience behind him. Senior Drew Bailey and junior Johnny Richardson, the only returners with experience, have just 22 combined career tackles. Redshirt freshman G.G. Robinson, junior college transfer Chris Williams and early-enrollee freshman Kordell Slater will all compete for the starting spot.

THE PRESSER

Jackson ran for 960 yards last season, the fifth-best total for an FBS QB (and sixth best among all ACC players). He logged five 100-yard games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SLOWING JACKSON DOWN?** "We did a very good job of keeping him in the pocket. Given a year now, they're going to prepare all spring and all camp with him as the starter. He'll become much more effective in their base offense." —ACC head coach

Jackson is a departure from the pro-style-type quarterbacks Petrino usually favors. And his passing needs work—Jackson ranked No. 71 in the nation in pass efficiency, and his 54.7 completion percentage was tied for 90th among FBS quarterbacks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OFFENSE'S LIMITATIONS WITH JACKSON UNDER CENTER?** "A lot more spread quarterback-type runs than before. The passing game is pretty standardized. Maybe more short bubble passes and screens with a quarterback who isn't a great pocket guy." —ACC defensive coach

Louisville got good news in the offseason when four key starters on defense decided to return to school, including LB Devonte Fields (team-leading 22 TFLs and 10½ sacks) and S Josh Harvey-Clemons (three interceptions). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE RETURNING DEFENSE?** "Blocking them up front? Wow. They're big, physical and athletic. That was probably the most talented defensive front in the conference—them and Clemson. They've just got some freaky athletes." —ACC head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Lamar Jackson**	So.	6-3	196	●
RB	**Brandon Radcliff**	Sr.	5-9	214	●
WR	**James Quick**	Sr.	6-1	191	●
WR	**Ja'Quay Savage**	Jr.	6-3	214	●
WR	**Jamari Staples**	Sr.	6-4	196	●
TE	**Cole Hikutini**	Sr.	6-5	242	●
C	**Tobijah Hughley**	Sr.	6-3	289	●
RG	**Kiola Mahoni**	Jr.	6-3	300	
LG	**Lukayus McNeil**	So.	6-8	313	●
RT	**Kenny Thomas**	So.	6-6	320	
LT	**Geron Christian**	So.	6-6	320	●
K	**Austin Johnson**	Fr.	6-2	195	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Chris Williams**	Jr.	6-1	295	
NT	**DeAngelo Brown**	Sr.	6-0	308	●
DE	**Drew Bailey**	Sr.	6-3	284	
SLB	**Devonte Fields**	Sr.	6-4	245	●
ILB	**Keith Kelsey**	Sr.	6-1	236	●
MLB	**Stacy Thomas**	Jr.	6-1	225	●
WLB	**James Hearns**	Jr.	6-3	257	
CB	**Shaq Wiggins**	Jr.	5-10	171	●
CB	**Trumaine Washington**	Jr.	5-10	181	●
SS	**Josh Harvey-Clemons**	Sr.	6-5	230	●
FS	**Chucky Williams**	Jr.	6-2	204	●
P	**Austin Johnson**	Fr.	6-2	195	

6½

Kelsey led all Louisville linebackers with 6½ disrupted dropbacks in 2015.

ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 9.0 ● FPI CHANCE LOUISVILLE WINS

9/1 vs. Charlotte **99%** ● **9/9** @ Syracuse **81%** ● **9/17** vs. Florida State **31%**
9/24 @ Marshall **86%** ● **10/1** @ Clemson **21%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/14** vs. Duke **90%**
10/22 vs. NC State **82%** ● **10/29** @ Virginia **82%** ● **11/5** @ Boston College **74%**
11/12 vs. Wake Forest **89%** ● **11/17** @ Houston **72%** ● **11/26** vs. Kentucky **88%**

4 NC State

COACH Dave Doeren (4th season)
18–20 (1–1 in bowl games)

Dave Doeren goes into a crucial fourth season with a revamped offensive staff, a new starting quarterback—and plenty of questions after an underwhelming 2015 season. Add in a more challenging nonconference schedule (hello, Notre Dame and ECU; goodbye, Troy and South Alabama) and the Wolfpack will remain a step behind the Atlantic's elite. —A.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (3–5)
BOWL GAME Belk Bowl
vs. Mississippi State, 51–28 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Jacoby Brissett: 2,662 yards
RUSHING **Matthew Dayes: 865 yards**
RECEIVING **Jaylen Samuels: 597 yards**
TACKLES **Airius Moore: 77**
SACKS Mike Rose: 10½
INTERCEPTIONS **Jerod Fernandez: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Matthew Dayes
The team's leading rusher a year ago, Dayes would have cleared 1,000 yards if he hadn't missed the final five games of the season with turf toe (an injury that also ended his musings about declaring for the NFL draft as a junior). He averaged a team-high 108.1 yards per game in 2015 and 6.5 yards per carry. NC State has depth in the backfield with the returns of hybrid TE Jaylen Samuels and RB Reggie Gallaspy II, but the strength of its run game centers on a healthy Dayes.

X-FACTOR WR Nyheim Hines
Best known for his 100-yard kickoff return against Clemson, Hines needs to build off a freshman year that featured dynamic plays in the return game—he led the team with 1,419 all-purpose yards. But he was inconsistent on offense, as only 499 of his yards came from scrimmage. Hines, who ran track with the indoor team this winter, can play tailback and slot, and much more will be put on his shoulders in 2016.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Though some believe sophomore Jalan McClendon, who played in seven games last year, has the edge, redshirt freshman Jakobi Meyers presents more of a dual threat—in fact, he's the best running quarterback Doeren has had since he arrived. Even if McClendon becomes the starter, new offensive coordinator Eli Drinkwitz, a former assistant at Boise State who learned the spread from Gus Malzahn at Auburn, could design packages to utilize Meyers' running ability.

THE PRESSER

NC State brings back eight starters on defense, and its strength will be in the interior, with 300-pounder B.J. Hill. The Wolfpack ranked 11th among Power 5 schools in nonsack rushes between the tackles last season, allowing 3.85 yards per carry. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO RUN ON THEM?** "If you're really good up front, you go nose to nose with them and you go right at them. If you don't feel you can handle that, then what kind of perimeter game do you have and can you fatigue those guys?" —ACC head coach

McClendon will be under the microscope, replacing the steady Jacoby Brissett, who threw for 43 touchdowns and more than 5,000 yards in his two years in Raleigh. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT McCLENDON'S STRENGTHS?** "He can throw it through the car wash and it won't get wet, but he'll throw it to the other team too. If he was the answer, he'd have been in already. He can get out of the pocket but not like Brissett." —ACC defensive coach

NC State hasn't had a 1,000-yard receiver since 2003. In fact, no receiver under Doeren has had more than 620 yards. Samuels' 597 yards was tops last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE SKILL PLAYERS?** "They don't have guys outside who can stretch the field vertically and make you afraid of playing man-to-man, so that allows you to overload or play to their strength, which is their run game. You don't really see the speed of those guys like you do from Clemson or Florida State." —ACC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Jalan McClendon**	So.	6-5	212	
RB	**Matthew Dayes**	Sr.	5-9	203	●
RB	**Jaylen Samuels**	Jr.	5-11	223	●
WR	**Bra'Lon Cherry**	Sr.	5-11	191	●
WR	**Jumichael Ramos**	Sr.	6-2	200	●
TE	**Cole Cook**	Jr.	6-6	250	
C	**Joseph Scelfo**	Sr.	5-11	300	
RG	**Tony Adams**	Jr.	6-2	315	●
LG	**Bryce Kennedy**	Sr.	6-3	305	
RT	**Tyler Jones**	So.	6-3	300	
LT	**Will Richardson**	So.	6-6	303	●
K	**Connor Haskins**	Sr.	5-8	176	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Darian Roseboro**	So.	6-4	285	
DT	**B.J. Hill**	Jr.	6-4	300	●
DT	**Kentavius Street**	Jr.	6-2	290	●
DE	**Bradley Chubb**	Jr.	6-4	273	●
LB	**Airius Moore**	Jr.	6-0	237	●
LB	**Jerod Fernandez**	Jr.	6-0	220	●
NB	**Dravious Wright**	Sr.	5-10	208	●
CB	**Mike Stevens**	Jr.	5-11	190	●
CB	**Jack Tocho**	Sr.	6-0	200	
SS	**Josh Jones**	Jr.	6-2	215	●
FS	**Germaine Pratt**	Jr.	6-3	234	
P	**A.J. Cole III**	So.	6-4	230	●

65

Samuels led all FBS TEs with 65 receptions and caught an ACC-best 84.4 percent of targets.

JACOB KUPFERMAN/CSM/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.1 ● **FPI CHANCE NC STATE WINS**

9/1 vs. William & Mary **96%** ● **9/10** @ East Carolina **80%** ● **9/17** vs. Old Dominion **93%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** vs. Wake Forest **74%** ● **10/8** vs. Notre Dame **33%** ● **10/15** @ Clemson **8%**
10/22 @ Louisville **18%** ● **10/29** vs. Boston College **67%** ● **11/5** vs. Florida State **12%**
11/12 @ Syracuse **58%** ● **11/19** vs. Miami (Fla.) **44%** ● **11/25** @ North Carolina **23%**

5 Boston College

COACH Steve Addazio (4th season)
17–21 (0–2 in bowl games)

So much for defense winning championships. BC had the nation's No. 1 defense in 2015 ... but also the third-worst offense. The Eagles posted their first losing record under Steve Addazio, including going winless in the ACC. But that downturn should be short-lived: With a revamped coaching staff, the Eagles could make it back to a bowl if they can find stability at quarterback. —A.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (0–8)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **John Fadule: 464 yards**
RUSHING **Jeff Smith: 450 yards**
RECEIVING **Thadd Smith: 233 yards**
TACKLES Steven Daniels: 82
SACKS **Matt Milano: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS Justin Simmons: 5

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE Harold Landry
As a sophomore, Landry had 15½ TFLs last season off the edge, using his combination of speed and power—plus his 6-foot-3, 245-pound frame—to create matchup advantages. He was tied for fourth on the team with 4½ sacks in '15, and this year the goal is to reach double digits. Landry is one of an impressive seven starters returning on defense for Boston College, including three of its five leaders in tackles for loss.

X-FACTOR LB Connor Strachan
Under former coordinator Don Brown, BC got heaps of production from its linebackers last season, thanks in large part to star senior Steven Daniels. Though Brown and Daniels are gone, expect more of the same under new DC Jim Reid, hired from Iowa. Strachan (75 tackles in '15, second best on the team) takes over in the middle and might be even more physical and athletic than Daniels, a second-team All-ACC linebacker last year.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
BC must get this one right to avoid another losing season. The numbers in 2015 were ugly: Four QBs had at least 40 attempts, but none had a better completion rate than 52 percent; they combined for just eight passing TDs and averaged only 5.36 yards per attempt; and they logged seven games with fewer than 100 passing yards. Patrick Towles, a graduate transfer from Kentucky, is expected to battle for the top spot with Darius Wade, who returns from a broken left ankle after starting the first three games of 2015.

THE PRESSER

The Eagles' defense led the nation last year with just 254.3 yards allowed per game and ranked No. 5 in pass efficiency defense, giving up only nine passing touchdowns, tops in the ACC and fourth fewest in the country. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THE DEFENSE WILL MAINTAIN THAT LEVEL OF PLAY?** "Their front seven are always big guys, very physical. They play together very well. They are more athletic in the secondary than they have been in the past." —ACC offensive coach

Towles lost his starting job at Kentucky at the end of 2015, and after graduating in December and transferring to BC, he'll be eligible to play immediately. His 5,099 career passing yards and 22 career starts make him one of the most experienced players on the roster. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TOWLES' IMPACT ON THE TEAM?** "He's got some ability, but there's always a reason guys transfer after they got beat out. But I will say this: He's better than anyone [at BC] who's played against us." —ACC defensive coach

Top returning receiver Thadd Smith had just 233 yards last year (57th in the ACC), and top returning RB Tyler Rouse tallied 426 yards (23rd), highlighting another problem for BC: few playmakers at the skill positions. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OFFENSIVE THREATS?** "They really don't scare you outside, so it allows you to focus on truly stopping the run. There's always a guy who can be the unblocked defender. They'll try to run plays to exploit that, but they don't have the people to execute it." —ACC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Patrick Towles**	Sr.	6-5	238	●
RB	**Jon Hilliman**	So.	6-0	224	●
TE	**Michael Giacone**	Sr.	6-5	254	
WR	**Thadd Smith**	Jr.	5-9	175	●
WR	**Charlie Callinan**	Jr.	6-4	224	●
TE	**Tommy Sweeney**	So.	6-5	246	●
C	**Jon Baker**	Jr.	6-3	293	●
RG	**Chris Lindstrom**	So.	6-4	260	●
LG	**Jim Cashman**	Sr.	6-7	302	
RT	**Jimmy Lowery**	Sr.	6-4	290	
LT	**Aaron Monteiro**	So.	6-7	336	●
K	**Colton Lichtenberg**	So.	5-10	175	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Kevin Kavalec**	Sr.	6-2	253	
DT	**Truman Gutapfel**	Sr.	6-3	281	●
DT	**Ray Smith**	So.	6-1	264	
DE	**Harold Landry**	Jr.	6-3	245	●
SLB	**Matt Milano**	Sr.	6-1	218	●
MLB	**Connor Strachan**	Jr.	6-2	230	●
WLB	**Ty Schwab**	Jr.	6-1	222	
CB	**Isaac Yiadom**	Jr.	6-1	184	●
CB	**Kamrin Moore**	Jr.	5-11	192	●
SS	**William Harris**	So.	6-2	193	
FS	**John Johnson**	Sr.	6-0	198	●
P	**Satchel Ziffer**	Sr.	6-4	206	

17½

Milano had 17½ TFLs in 2015, third among 2016 ACC returners.

ANTHONY NESMITH/CSM/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.3 ● **FPI CHANCE BOSTON COLLEGE WINS**

9/3 vs. Georgia Tech (Dublin, Ireland) **49%** ● **9/10** @ Massachusetts (Foxborough) **92%**
9/17 @ Virginia Tech **32%** ● **9/24** vs. Wagner **99%** ● **10/1** vs. Buffalo **92%** ● **10/7** vs. Clemson **12%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** vs. Syracuse **70%** ● **10/29** @ NC State **33%** ● **11/5** vs. Louisville **26%**
11/11 @ Florida State **5%** ● **11/19** vs. Connecticut **74%** ● **11/26** @ Wake Forest **47%**

6 Wake Forest

COACH Dave Clawson (3rd season)
6–18 (0–0 in bowl games)

Head coach Dave Clawson has won a total of two ACC games in his first two seasons since joining Wake from Bowling Green, but he's aiming for a turnaround in Year 3 with a much more experienced team. With nine starters back on offense and a manageable nonconference schedule, the Deacs can dream big: They might even jump to five or six wins this season. —A.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (1–7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **John Wolford: 1,791 yards**
RUSHING **Tyler Bell: 451 yards**
RECEIVING **Cortez Lewis: 611 yards**
TACKLES Brandon Chubb: 107
SACKS **Duke Ejiofor: 4½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Brad Watson: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB John Wolford
Wake Forest's offense was among the worst in the nation in 2015, ranking 119th in points (17.4) and 113th in yards per game (333.4)—though both were improvements from 2014. Wolford has never thrown more touchdowns than interceptions in a season, and his nine passing TDs last year ranked just 15th among ACC QBs. But now is the time for that to change, with sophomore Kendall Hinton pushing him for the starting job. Whoever is under center will be aided by receiver Cortez Lewis, who had 611 yards and four touchdowns as a redshirt freshman last year.

X-FACTOR DE Duke Ejiofor
Despite missing much of the preseason and the first five games due to a concussion last year, Ejiofor was the Deacons' leading pass rusher with 4½ sacks. The junior started to come into his own late in the season, making 16 more tackles in seven games in 2015 than he did in 10 games in 2014. Clawson believes Ejiofor has an opportunity to play at an All-ACC level in 2016.

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
All-ACC player Brandon Chubb (last year's leading tackler with 107) and Hunter Williams are gone, leaving big holes to fill at the position. Senior returning starter Marquel Lee will be crucial to solidifying the unit: He had 71 tackles and led the team with 10 TFLs last season. Also look for junior Jaboree Williams, sophomore NB Demetrius Kemp and redshirt freshmen Nate Mays and Justin Strnad to contribute.

THE PRESSER

The offensive line remains an issue, as the Deacs ranked No. 122 with 105.2 rushing ypg. (Somehow, that's 65 yards per game better than in 2014.) **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE O-LINE'S STRUGGLES?** "These guys get knocked back, and they can't create any space. They're undermanned, but they're also at a disadvantage in the style in which they're asked to block. You can't take a guy that's not as physically talented as the player that he's going against and make him go lateral. The guy's getting his butt kicked." —ACC defensive coach

Clawson's defense has been strong, ranking in the top 50 in points allowed (24.6), yards allowed (363.8) and pass defense (202.5). This unit held Clemson, FSU and Notre Dame below their season scoring averages. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STABILITY OF THE DEFENSE?** "They're very smart, they know their schemes very well and the effort their guys play with allows them to really be in every game they play. They're not going to have a lot of missed assignments that are going to go for big plays." —ACC offensive coach

Wake Forest had 18 freshmen and sophomores make significant contributions in 2015, meaning this team can take advantage of both youth and experience in 2016. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WAKE'S IMPROVEMENTS DESPITE CONSECUTIVE 3–9 SEASONS?** "They're very sound and well-coached, but athletically they get outmatched. You'll see the freshmen and sophomores be much improved. Dramatically." —ACC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**John Wolford**	Jr.	6-1	205	●
TB	**Tyler Bell**	So.	5-11	205	●
WR	**Tabari Hines**	So.	5-10	165	●
WR	**Jared Crump**	Sr.	6-3	205	
WR	**Cortez Lewis**	So.	6-1	200	●
TE	**Cam Serigne**	Jr.	6-3	245	●
C	**Josh Harris**	Sr.	6-4	310	●
RG	**Phil Haynes**	So.	6-4	280	●
LG	**Tyler Hayworth**	Sr.	6-4	325	●
RT	**Ryan Anderson**	So.	6-6	290	
LT	**Justin Herron**	So.	6-5	310	●
K	**Mike Weaver**	Jr.	6-1	195	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Duke Ejiofor**	Jr.	6-4	275	●
NT	**Zeek Rodney**	Jr.	6-1	295	●
DT	**Josh Banks**	Sr.	6-4	275	●
DE	**Wendell Dunn**	Jr.	6-3	250	●
LB	**Jaboree Williams**	Jr.	6-0	240	
LB	**Marquel Lee**	Sr.	6-3	235	●
NB	**Demetrius Kemp**	So.	6-1	205	
CB	**Dionte Austin**	So.	6-0	165	
CB	**Brad Watson**	Sr.	6-0	190	●
SS	**Ryan Janvion**	Sr.	5-11	190	●
FS	**Cameron Glenn**	So.	6-1	200	
P	**Dom Maggio**	Fr.	6-3	165	

73

Serigne's 73 targets ranked fifth among Power 5 tight ends in 2015.

BRIAN WESTERHOLT/FOUR SEAM IMAGES/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.8 ● **FPI CHANCE WAKE FOREST WINS**

9/1 vs. Tulane **88%** ● **9/10** @ Duke **43%** ● **9/17** vs. Delaware **98%**
9/24 @ Indiana **41%** ● **10/1** @ NC State **26%** ● **10/8** vs. Syracuse **62%**
10/15 @ Florida State **4%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Army **86%** ● **11/5** vs. Virginia **62%**
11/12 @ Louisville **11%** ● **11/19** vs. Clemson **9%** ● **11/26** vs. Boston College **53%**

7 Syracuse

COACH Dino Babers (1st season)

Dino Babers hopes the up-tempo attack he used at Bowling Green will revitalize an Orange unit that ranked 118th in the nation in yards per game and 116th in passing yards per game in 2015. The change in philosophy should lead to a much-improved offense, but the defensive line has huge holes to fill, and Cuse will struggle to make the strides needed to get back to a bowl. —A.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 (2-6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Eric Dungey: 1,298 yards**
RUSHING **Jordan Fredericks: 607 yards**
RECEIVING **Steve Ishmael: 570 yards**
TACKLES **Zaire Franklin: 81**
SACKS Ron Thompson: 7
INTERCEPTIONS **Cordell Hudson: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Eric Dungey
Dungey is the favorite to win the quarterback competition and orchestrate Babers' desired offensive transformation. In eight games as a true freshman last fall, he was responsible for 16 touchdowns and 1,649 yards of offense. Good news for Cuse: Dungey will run less in the new scheme—which means fewer chances for hits like the one that caused the ugly head injury that cost him the final four games in '15. But junior backup Zack Mahoney and early enrollee Rex Culpepper should stay ready: Due to injuries, Syracuse has used six different quarterbacks over the past two seasons.

X-FACTOR WR Ervin Philips
Babers wants every player who was listed at RB/WR to settle into one spot or the other. For Philips, who took on more of a hybrid role in his first two years (accumulating 1,247 total yards rushing, receiving and returning), that means his days coming out of the backfield are numbered. The 5-foot-11, 180-pound junior will most likely line up in the slot to take advantage of his ability to make defenders miss.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive end
With the graduation or early departure of three of last season's top defensive ends and the offseason dismissal of three others, game experience at the position is a major concern. Redshirt freshman Jake Pickard will compete with converted TE Trey Dunkelberger and converted LB Kenneth Ruff. But don't be surprised if more reshuffling of the roster occurs, especially with Delaware State grad transfer Gabe Sherrod in the mix.

THE PRESSER

Dungey made seven starts last season, the last five of them losses, but showed the mobility to make plays out of the pocket (43.9 rush yards per game last year). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW DUNGEY FITS INTO BABERS' SCHEME?** "The style of offense they're going to play, where they have quarterback-run type of plays, could be an asset to them, and he has the ability to get the ball outside if you're either outleveraged or in one-on-one matchups." —ACC defensive coach

Syracuse returns 97 percent of its overall offensive production from a unit that ranked 118th in the FBS, and it still isn't clear whether the Orange have the personnel to implement Babers' new offense (Bowling Green ranked fourth in yards per game). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU EXPECT BABERS TO DO IN YEAR 1?** "They're going to oversplit you on the wide receivers, they're going to tempo you, they're going to throw the ball vertically down the field. And that's great. But where is their personnel, and how does it match what he wants to do? Everybody thinks that's the secret sauce, that offense, so we'll see how their personnel is." —ACC head coach

The Orange might have significant issues on defense given the inexperience and depth issues at defensive end. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THIS YOUNG DEFENSE WILL ADAPT?** "That's going to be an Achilles' heel there, for sure. Rome's not built in a day. That part is going to be hard on defense." —ACC head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Eric Dungey**	So.	6-3	212	●
RB	**Dontae Strickland**	So.	5-11	196	●
WR	**Ervin Philips**	Jr.	5-11	180	●
WR	**Brisly Estime**	Sr.	5-9	182	●
WR	**Steve Ishmael**	Jr.	6-2	202	●
WR	**Alvin Cornelius**	Sr.	6-1	187	●
C	**Jason Emerich**	Sr.	6-3	284	●
RG	**Omari Palmer**	Sr.	6-3	321	●
LG	**Aaron Roberts**	So.	6-4	300	
RT	**Jamar McGloster**	Jr.	6-7	330	
LT	**Michael Lasker**	Sr.	6-5	318	
K	**Cole Murphy**	Jr.	6-3	197	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Gabe Sherrod**	Sr.	6-4	240	
DT	**Chris Slayton**	So.	6-4	297	
NT	**Kayton Samuels**	So.	6-0	318	●
DE	**Jake Pickard**	RFr.	6-5	262	
WLB	**Parris Bennett**	Jr.	6-0	218	●
MLB	**Zaire Franklin**	Jr.	6-0	229	●
SLB	**Jonathan Thomas**	Jr.	6-1	205	●
CB	**Corey Winfield**	Jr.	6-1	191	●
CB	**Cordell Hudson**	So.	5-11	175	●
SS	**Antwan Cordy**	Jr.	5-8	180	●
FS	**Chauncey Scissum**	Jr.	6-2	210	●
P	**Sterling Hofrichter**	RFr.	5-9	181	

23

Ishmael had 23 catches for first downs, 10 more than Syracuse's next-best player.

ALAN SCHWARTZ/CAL SPORT MEDIA/ZUMA PRESS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.1 ● **FPI CHANCE SYRACUSE WINS**

9/2 vs. Colgate **97%** ● **9/9** vs. Louisville **19%** ● **9/17** vs. South Florida **48%** ● **9/24** @ Connecticut **56%**
10/1 vs. Notre Dame (East Rutherford, N.J.) **15%** ● **10/8** @ Wake Forest **38%**
10/15 vs. Virginia Tech **40%** ● **10/22** @ Boston College **30%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ Clemson **5%**
11/12 vs. NC State **42%** ● **11/19** vs. Florida State **7%** ● **11/26** @ Pittsburgh **18%**

1 North Carolina

COACH Larry Fedora (5th season)
32–20 (1–2 in bowl games)

Critics have long wondered why North Carolina hasn't develop into an annual title hopeful as it has in basketball. Now it seems that Larry Fedora might have the program on the cusp of contention as he goes for consecutive seasons with double-digit wins, which would mark the first time the Tar Heels have done that in nearly two decades. —Jared Shanker

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11–3 (8–0)
BOWL GAME Russell Athletic Bowl vs. Baylor, 49-38 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Marquise Williams: 3,072 yards
RUSHING **Elijah Hood: 1,463 yards**
RECEIVING **Mack Hollins: 745 yards**
TACKLES **Donnie Miles: 128**
SACKS **Mikey Bart: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS **M.J. Stewart: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Mitch Trubisky
The run-pass and option responsibilities in Fedora's spread offense can load a quarterback's plate, but starter Trubisky is in his fourth year in this system. The junior has never started, but he nearly won the job in 2014 over Marquise Williams and even replaced an ineffective Williams for a game in 2015. He completed 40 of 47 attempts last season, and his 93.3 QBR was first nationally among quarterbacks with at least 40 attempts.

X-FACTOR DT Nazair Jones
Last year Jones missed four games, but his absence was never felt more than in the bowl game against Baylor—the Heels set a bowl record with 645 rushing yards allowed. No, it wasn't entirely because Jones wasn't there, but it does help demonstrate just how central the 6-foot-5, 300-pound junior defensive tackle is to the interior of a defense that was No. 121 nationally against the rush last season. He could blossom into one of the conference's better linemen after just 40 tackles last season.

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
Jeff Schoettmer and Shakeel Rashad accounted for most of the tackles from the linebacker position (223 combined) last fall. But now that they've graduated, sophomore Andre Smith and junior Cayson Collins are the only returning linebackers with at least 20 tackles in 2015—they combined for 91. Smith can play strong or inside linebacker, which gives the Heels flexibility as they fill out the unit with a number of younger players, led by early enrollee Jonathan Smith.

THE PRESSER

North Carolina was an onside kick away from a conference championship last season, and the Heels won at least 10 games for the first time since 1997. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER UNC IS HERE TO STAY?** "They have the potential to be just as good as last year. [Trubisky] is more of a passer, more of a pro-style guy. Marquise was a college version of Cam Newton. The question is how well will the defense play, because the offense won't drop (off) much." —ACC defensive coach

Six of the top seven receivers from 2015 return, including Mack Hollins, whose 24.8 yards per reception led the country, and Ryan Switzer, who tied for the team high with 55 catches and is considered one of the best slot receivers in the conference. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE RECEIVERS?** "Hollins is one of the most underrated receivers in the conference. Switzer causes problems in the slot because he's matched against a safety. If you can't get pressure, they go over the top." —ACC defensive coach

Gene Chizik, a Broyles Award finalist in his first season as coordinator, shaved two touchdowns from the 2014 defense's scoring average. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT CHIZIK'S IMPACT?** "Their philosophy has been to stop you with six, seven guys in the box and play coverage to not allow you to hit the big play. Coverages that generally you play on third down, they're playing on first and second down and banking that they can stop the run with their down linemen and linebackers." —ACC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Mitch Trubisky**	Jr.	6-3	220	
RB	**Elijah Hood**	Jr.	6-0	220	●
WR	**Bug Howard**	Sr.	6-5	210	
WR	**Mack Hollins**	Sr.	6-4	210	●
WR	**Ryan Switzer**	Sr.	5-10	185	●
TE	**Brandon Fritts**	So.	6-4	245	
C	**Lucas Crowley**	Sr.	6-3	290	●
RG	**John Ferranto**	Sr.	6-6	300	
LG	**Caleb Peterson**	Sr.	6-5	300	●
RT	**Jon Heck**	Sr.	6-7	300	●
LT	**Bentley Spain**	Jr.	6-6	300	●
K	**Nick Weiler**	Sr.	6-0	190	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Dajaun Drennon**	Jr.	6-4	255	●
DT	**Nazair Jones**	Jr.	6-5	300	●
DT	**Jalen Dalton**	So.	6-6	280	
DE	**Mikey Bart**	Sr.	6-3	270	●
WLB	**J.B. Copeland**	Jr.	6-2	205	
MLB	**Andre Smith**	So.	6-0	235	●
SLB	**Cayson Collins**	Jr.	6-1	235	
CB	**M.J. Stewart**	Jr.	5-11	200	●
CB	**Des Lawrence**	Sr.	6-1	185	●
SS	**Donnie Miles**	Jr.	5-11	200	●
FS	**Dominquie Green**	Sr.	5-11	190	
P	**Joey Mangili**	Sr.	6-3	205	●

47

Hood gained 5-plus yards on 47 percent of his runs in 2015, tops in the ACC and third in the FBS (minimum 200 carries).

MARGARET BOWLES/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.4 ● **FPI CHANCE NORTH CAROLINA WINS**

9/3 vs. Georgia (Atlanta) **38%** ● **9/10** @ Illinois **81%** ● **9/17** vs. James Madison **98%**
9/24 vs. Pittsburgh **67%** ● **10/1** @ Florida State **14%** ● **10/8** vs. Virginia Tech **72%**
10/15 @ Miami (Fla.) **47%** ● **10/22** @ Virginia **78%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Georgia Tech **83%**
11/10 @ Duke **75%** ● **11/19** vs. The Citadel **98%** ● **11/25** vs. NC State **77%**

2 Miami (Fla.)

COACH Mark Richt (1st season)

The hiring of Mark Richt has Miami fans dreaming of the early 2000s and clamoring, "The U is back!" While there is still a clear talent discrepancy between Miami and the ACC's top playoff contenders, a Coastal Division title is within reach—and that's enough to rile up a fan base that hasn't cheered for a conference champ since the Canes joined the ACC. —J.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (5-3)
BOWL GAME Hyundai Sun Bowl vs. Washington State, 20-14 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Brad Kaaya: 3,238 yards**
RUSHING **Joseph Yearby: 1,002 yards**
RECEIVING Rashawn Scott: 695 yards
TACKLES **Jermaine Grace: 79**
SACKS **Al-Quadin Muhammad: 5**
INTERCEPTIONS Artie Burns: 6

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Brad Kaaya
Kaaya, a junior, has started since his freshman season and is one of the ACC's best players—and maybe even one of the country's best quarterbacks. Last year he threw for 16 TDs and just 5 INTs (tied for third best in the ACC), and he should excel under Richt, who uses more traditional pocket passers. Last season Kaaya was second in the ACC behind Deshaun Watson in total pass yards and completions of more than 20 yards.

X-FACTOR DL coach Craig Kuligowski
While at Missouri, Kuligowski developed four future NFL first-rounders along the defensive line—and that was without the kind of blue-chip prospects that Miami boasts. So Miami fans are salivating at what the Canes' new defensive line coach will do with the likes of juniors Al-Quadin Muhammad and Chad Thomas—both of whom are capable of 10 sacks in a season but have yet to truly tap into their talent.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
An improved offensive line is pivotal to any potential turnaround. Junior LT Trevor Darling returns and likely will anchor an experienced unit that needs to live up to the Miami pedigree. The group returns nearly every start, but the new regime could shake up the depth chart. Kc McDermott and Alex Gall will battle at left guard, unless McDermott wins the right tackle job from Sunny Odogwu, who is recovering from an MCL injury. With new OL coach Stacy Searels demanding improvement on all fronts, even Darling's job isn't secure.

THE PRESSER

Richt won two conference titles at Georgia, and although that wasn't enough for Bulldogs fans, Miami faithful eager for a championship taste would be thrilled with an ACC title and playoff contention. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE RICHT HIRE?** "He's going to do a great job. To me, they're a sleeping giant. What Miami has done and how they've tried to run their offense is what Georgia has done. It's a great hire, and it's going to get them back in the mix." —ACC defensive coach

Miami has earned a reputation as one of the FBS's more confounding programs, playing like a title contender one week and falling flat the next. Last year? A 10-point win vs. Virginia Tech followed by a 58-point pummeling by Clemson. That's plagued Miami for a decade. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CANES' INCONSISTENCY?** "At times they play with anyone and look like 'The U,' and other times they've cashed in their chips and are ready to go home. You didn't know what Miami you'd get. That won't happen with Richt." —ACC offensive coach

The Canes keep signing blue-chip defensive line recruits with impressive résumés, but they are not producing once they arrive in Coral Gables. Only once since 2011 has the defense finished in the top 50 nationally in sacks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE GROUP KULIGOWSKI INHERITS?** "They're talented, but when you identify them, I don't know how hard they play. I don't know if it was because of the situation with the coach, but you didn't get the traditional effort of a Miami team." —ACC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Brad Kaaya**	Jr.	6-4	210	●
RB	**Joseph Yearby**	Jr.	5-9	202	●
WR	**Braxton Berrios**	Jr.	5-9	180	
WR	**Stacy Coley**	Sr.	6-1	187	●
WR	**Lawrence Cager**	So.	6-5	215	
TE	**David Njoku**	So.	6-4	244	●
C	**Nick Linder**	Jr.	6-3	302	●
RG	**Danny Isidora**	Sr.	6-4	325	●
LG	**Kc McDermott**	Jr.	6-6	310	●
RT	**Tyree St. Louis**	So.	6-5	312	●
LT	**Trevor Darling**	Jr.	6-5	316	●
K	**Michael Badgley**	Jr.	5-10	180	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Chad Thomas**	Jr.	6-5	275	
NT	**Anthony Moten**	Jr.	6-4	299	●
DT	**Gerald Willis**	So.	6-2	280	
DE	**Al-Quadin Muhammad**	Jr.	6-3	256	●
WLB	**Trent Harris**	Jr.	6-2	251	●
MLB	**Shaquille Quarterman**	Fr.	6-1	239	
SLB	**Jermaine Grace**	Sr.	6-1	221	●
CB	**Sheldrick Redwine**	So.	6-1	196	
CB	**Corn Elder**	Sr.	5-10	183	●
SS	**Jamal Carter**	Sr.	6-1	209	
FS	**Rayshawn Jenkins**	Sr.	6-1	208	●
P	**Justin Vogel**	Sr.	6-4	208	●

98.4

Kaaya had a 98.4 QBR on fourth down in 2015, third among qualified Power 5 QBs.

GRANT HALVERSON/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.6 ● FPI CHANCE MIAMI WINS

9/3 vs. Florida A&M **99%** ● **9/10** vs. Florida Atlantic **96%** ● **9/17** @ Appalachian State **73%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** @ Georgia Tech **63%** ● **10/8** vs. Florida State **21%** ● **10/15** vs. North Carolina **53%**
10/20 @ Virginia Tech **53%** ● **10/29** @ Notre Dame **26%** ● **11/5** vs. Pittsburgh **62%**
11/12 @ Virginia **72%** ● **11/19** @ NC State **56%** ● **11/26** vs. Duke **82%**

3 Pittsburgh

COACH Pat Narduzzi (2nd season)
8–5 (0–1 in bowl games)

After four consecutive 6-6 regular seasons under Todd Graham and Paul Chryst, Pitt finally saw some improvement in Pat Narduzzi's first year, earning eight wins and its first national ranking since 2010 (No. 23 after Week 8). Realistically, the roster still might be a year away, but an unpredictable Coastal Division could have Pitt vying for an ACC title-game appearance. —J.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Military Bowl Presented by Northrop Grumman vs. Navy, 44-28 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Nathan Peterman: 2,287 yards**
RUSHING **Qadree Ollison: 1,121 yards**
RECEIVING Tyler Boyd: 926 yards
TACKLES **Jordan Whitehead: 109**
SACKS **Ejuan Price: 11½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Avonte Maddox: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Nathan Peterman
In his first season at Pitt as a graduate transfer from Tennessee, Peterman was solid but unspectacular. Yes, he threw for 20 TDs, but his yards per attempt and yards per completion were both in the bottom half of ACC QBs. Peterman will have more pressure on him with top receiver Tyler Boyd (926 yards in 12 games) off to the NFL, so he'll need to find ways to make plays downfield to complement Pitt's top rushing attack.

X-FACTOR DE Dewayne Hendrix
The defensive line returns several key players, including Ejuan Price, the ACC leader in sacks per game (0.89), who was granted a sixth year of eligibility. But the pivotal piece is Hendrix, a coveted recruit who rarely played as a freshman at Tennessee before following Peterman to Pitt in the spring of 2015. Narduzzi says Hendrix, a former ESPN 300 recruit, thrilled coaches with his play on the scout team and in bowl prep last year. He should be in position to challenge Price for his sack crown.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
For Peterman to excel in the passing game, the Panthers will need several players to emerge at receiver and tight end. Boyd caught 43 percent of all passes in 2015, 65 more than second-leading receiver Dontez Ford (26 for 505 yards, 19.4 ypc). Zach Challingsworth and Quadree Henderson will also compete for catches, but sophomore Tre Tipton, a running QB and wide receiver in high school, might be best suited to replicate Boyd's all-purpose style.

THE PRESSER

James Conner missed nearly all of last season with a knee injury, then was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in November. He has worked out with the team throughout his cancer treatment, and Pitt hopes he returns this fall to his 2014 form, when he rushed for 1,765 yards and 26 TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT CONNER?** "He's one of the best backs I've seen. He's strong, hard to tackle and that style wears on you. After a while you don't want to hit him anymore. You don't see a lot of guys like him these days." —ACC defensive coach

When Conner rejoins the team, he'll enter a backfield with the ACC's 2015 offensive rookie of the year. In Conner's absence, sophomore Qadree Ollison rushed for 1,121 yards and 11 scores. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT STOPPING THE OFFENSE?** "You have to try to create turnovers against them and win third downs. We don't recruit to that same physical stature, and not many people in our conference do. You're not gonna whip them up front. You have to force mistakes." —ACC defensive coach

Narduzzi came to Pitt with the rep as an elite defensive mind. There's still room for improvement, but the D is trending up: Pitt's 37 sacks in 2015 was tied for 14th best among Power 5 teams and nearly double its total from 2014. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NARDUZZI'S DEFENSIVE APTITUDE?** "Schematically, it's difficult because he sends you a lot of problems. He'll do a lot of twists, stunts and blitzes in base. But it does put some pressure on the back end of the defense. There are opportunities for big plays." —ACC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Nathan Peterman**	Sr.	6-2	225	●
RB	**Qadree Ollison**	So.	6-2	230	●
TE	**Jaymar Parrish**	Sr.	6-2	270	
WR	**Dontez Ford**	Sr.	6-2	215	●
WR	**Jester Weah**	Jr.	6-3	205	
TE	**Scott Orndoff**	Sr.	6-5	265	●
C	**Alex Officer**	Jr.	6-4	335	●
RG	**Alex Bookser**	So.	6-6	310	
LG	**Dorian Johnson**	Sr.	6-5	300	●
RT	**Brian O'Neill**	So.	6-6	300	●
LT	**Adam Bisnowaty**	Sr.	6-6	300	●
K	**Chris Blewitt**	Sr.	5-9	190	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Dewayne Hendrix**	So.	6-4	270	●
NT	**Tyrique Jarrett**	Sr.	6-3	335	●
DT	**Shakir Soto**	Sr.	6-3	285	
DE	**Ejuan Price**	Sr.	6-0	250	●
WLB	**Mike Caprara**	Sr.	6-0	230	●
MLB	**Matt Galambos**	Sr.	6-2	240	●
SLB	**Elijah Zeise**	So.	6-2	215	
CB	**Damar Hamlin**	Fr.	6-1	185	
CB	**Avonte Maddox**	Jr.	5-9	170	●
SS	**Jordan Whitehead**	So.	5-11	185	●
FS	**Terrish Webb**	Sr.	5-11	190	●
P	**Ryan Winslow**	Jr.	6-5	210	●

5

Ollison became the fifth Pitt freshman to rush for 1,000 yards, including a 207-yard debut.

CHARLES LECLAIRE/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● **FPI CHANCE PITTSBURGH WINS**

9/3 vs. Villanova **97%** ● **9/10** vs. Penn State **63%** ● **9/17** @ Oklahoma State **24%**
9/24 @ North Carolina **33%** ● **10/1** vs. Marshall **86%** ● **10/8** vs. Georgia Tech **74%**
10/15 @ Virginia **68%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/27** vs. Virginia Tech **70%** ● **11/5** @ Miami (Fla.) **38%**
11/12 @ Clemson **13%** ● **11/19** vs. Duke **79%** ● **11/26** vs. Syracuse **82%**

4 Virginia Tech

COACH Justin Fuente (1st season)

Landing Memphis coach Justin Fuente to replace Frank Beamer has been widely praised, and there's hope that the Hokies could be back in ACC contention in his first season. Longtime defensive coordinator Bud Foster stayed on under the new regime, so Fuente can focus much of his attention on retrofitting a broken offense to his up-tempo style. —J.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7-6 (4-4)
BOWL GAME Camping World Independence Bowl vs. Tulsa, 55-52 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Michael Brewer: 1,703 yards
RUSHING **Travon McMillian: 1,043 yards**
RECEIVING **Isaiah Ford: 1,164 yards**
TACKLES **Chuck Clark: 107**
SACKS **Ken Ekanem: 4½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Adonis Alexander: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Travon McMillian
Who will emerge as the starting quarterback is anyone's guess, but at least the Hokies have one constant in the backfield in McMillian, a sophomore. Though the running back averaged only 8.4 carries through the first seven games in 2015, he caught fire over the final six contests, getting the ball 23.5 times per game and becoming the first Hokie since 2011 to gain 96 yards or more in five straight games.

X-FACTOR DE Vinny Mihota
A rotational player his first season, Mihota is pegged to replace All-ACC pass rusher Dadi Nicolas. Since 2004, no program has more sacks than Virginia Tech's 439. And while the 6-foot-5, 270-pound Mihota moves into a starting spot without much experience, in limited snaps he showed he can help in a variety of ways: He blocked a kick against Pitt and forced a critical fumble against North Carolina.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Last year Brenden Motley played admirably as the backup to senior Michael Brewer—he completed 56.1 percent of his passes and threw for 11 TDs with seven interceptions—but he won't just slide into the starting role. Fourth-ranked juco quarterback Jerod Evans joined the fold in the spring, and former ESPN 300 signal-caller Dwayne Lawson might be ready to start as a sophomore. Whoever earns the starting job likely will be raw, but Fuente is credited with developing Andy Dalton and Paxton Lynch, so there is valid cause for optimism.

THE PRESSER

The Hokies routinely had elite talent in their backfield under Beamer, but the program lacked a 1,000-yard receiver until Isaiah Ford led the ACC with 1,164 in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FORD'S IMPACT?** "He's dynamic, moves the chains and makes big plays. Everyone would want him on their team. They'd say 'I'd take him' from Miami to Notre Dame. He'll make them better, and there's not many players you could say that about on every team." —ACC offensive coach

Foster hopes to be a head coach, but when it became clear he wouldn't succeed Beamer, he was open to staying on. Few coordinators are as respected as Foster, who has coached a top-three scoring defense six times in his career. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FOSTER'S RETURN?** "It's a magical move by Fuente. Foster is one of the pre-eminent coordinators in college football and is able to attract all kinds of players. He can scheme against any offense." —ACC defensive coach

The defense was 39th among Power 5 teams in yards per pass attempt, its worst ranking since 2008. Before the precipitous fall last season, the Hokies had finished among the top 30 every year since 2009. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE SECONDARY?** "They don't have the secondary they've had in the past. They don't have a guy comparable to [former player Kendall Fuller] to complement Brandon Facyson. The safeties traditionally are very good, but the safeties in that secondary didn't make the same impact." —ACC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Jerod Evans**	Jr.	6-4	235	
RB	**Travon McMillian**	So.	6-0	200	●
WR	**Divine Deable**	Fr.	6-3	210	
WR	**Isaiah Ford**	Jr.	6-2	190	●
WR	**Cam Phillips**	Jr.	6-1	198	●
TE	**Bucky Hodges**	Jr.	6-7	245	●
C	**Eric Gallo**	Jr.	6-2	297	●
RG	**Augie Conte**	Sr.	6-6	303	●
LG	**Wyatt Teller**	Jr.	6-5	304	●
RT	**Parker Osterloh**	Jr.	6-8	329	
LT	**Jonathan McLaughlin**	Sr.	6-5	292	●
K	**Joey Slye**	Jr.	6-1	207	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Vinny Mihota**	So.	6-5	270	
NT	**Woody Baron**	Sr.	6-1	275	●
DT	**Nigel Williams**	Sr.	6-4	295	
DE	**Ken Ekanem**	Sr.	6-3	255	●
LB	**Tremaine Edmunds**	So.	6-5	236	
LB	**Andrew Motuapuaka**	Jr.	6-0	235	●
LB	**Anthony Shegog**	Jr.	6-3	212	
CB	**Brandon Facyson**	Jr.	6-2	191	●
CB	**Adonis Alexander**	So.	6-3	197	●
SS	**Terrell Edmunds**	So.	6-1	201	●
FS	**Chuck Clark**	Sr.	6-1	204	●
P	**Mitchell Ludwig**	Jr.	5-11	200	

12

Ford caught 12 of his 26 targets at least 25 yards downfield, tied for most in the Power 5.

JAMES HASKINS/ICON SPORTSWIRE

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.5 ● **FPI CHANCE VIRGINIA TECH WINS**

9/3 vs. Liberty **98%** ● **9/10** vs. Tennessee (Bristol, Tenn.) **14%** ● **9/17** vs. Boston College **69%**
9/24 vs. East Carolina **89%** ● **10/1** BYE ● **10/8** @ North Carolina **28%** ● **10/15** @ Syracuse **60%**
10/20 vs. Miami (Fla) **47%** ● **10/27** @ Pittsburgh **30%** ● **11/5** @ Duke **59%**
11/12 vs. Georgia Tech **65%** ● **11/19** @ Notre Dame **20%** ● **11/26** vs. Virginia **75%**

5 Georgia Tech

COACH Paul Johnson (9th season)
62–44* (2–5 in bowl games)

Paul Johnson is one of those coaches who seem to have a season ticket for the hot seat, and he appears headed back there in 2016 after a 3-9 season that began with talk of the playoff. Just two years ago, this program won 11 games, and the upcoming season will go a long way toward showing whether Georgia Tech can rally—and whether Johnson will be there to see it. —J.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (1–7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Justin Thomas: 1,345 yards**
RUSHING **Marcus Marshall: 654 yards**
RECEIVING **Ricky Jeune: 520 yards**
TACKLES **P.J. Davis: 77**
SACKS Adam Gotsis: 3
INTERCEPTIONS **Brant Mitchell: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Justin Thomas
Thomas was a Heisman Trophy dark horse after an impressive 2014 in which he was the third-best rushing QB in the FBS. But last year Thomas finished the season with 972 fewer total yards than he accumulated in 2014. That's in large part due to reduced production rushing the ball: His 488 yards last year was less than half of his 2014 total on just 45 fewer attempts. Georgia Tech can't win the ACC without Thomas re-emerging as one of the conference's best players and nearing 1,000 rushing yards again.

X-FACTOR RB Marcus Marshall
Marshall led the team in rushing as a freshman last season, but more than a quarter of his 654 yards came against Alcorn State in the opener—and his team-leading season total would have been good for just fourth on the 2014 squad. Marshall brings unique speed to the position—his three rushes of 50 yards or more was tied for second in the ACC. But he needs to produce against ACC teams; he had more than 10 rush attempts just twice in eight conference games last year.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive back
Last season's secondary fielded four senior starters, so there are several roles up for grabs on a unit that was solid in pass defense in 2015 (1.33 TD-to-INT rate, fifth best in the ACC, and 7.23 yards allowed per attempt). More than a dozen DBs could compete for the four roles: twin brothers Lance and Lawrence Austin, Step Durham, A.J. Gray and Corey Griffin are among those best positioned to earn starting spots.

THE PRESSER

Production dropped in almost every offensive category last year, including a 23-point dip in third-down conversion rate—the product of a ground attack that couldn't provide manageable down-and-distance opportunities. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THEIR OFFENSE GETS BACK ON TRACK?** "They were doing too much last year. When they're good, they're simple. They don't have those same big-time athletes, and they're trying to throw too much. Everybody usually hates playing that offense." —ACC offensive coach

Georgia Tech ranks 90th in defensive win probability since 2013, the year Ted Roof became defensive coordinator. The Jackets were 78th in Johnson's first five seasons. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER JOHNSON'S OFFENSE HINDERS HIS DEFENSE?** "I feel for Roof because what you're practicing against him you never use in a game. You're playing a triple-option team every day, then all of a sudden, 'Go defend empty.'" —ACC offensive coach

When GT throws, it often looks deep downfield to its big targets. Four times since 2009 a Yellow Jackets receiver has finished among the top eight nationally in yards per catch, including 6-foot-3, 212-pound Ricky Jeune in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT STOPPING THEIR RECEIVERS?** "First thing is to get your run/pass read against those receivers, and then you shouldn't be caught off guard. It's obvious when they're going to throw. The biggest thing with those guys is they make plays." —ACC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Justin Thomas**	Sr.	5-11	185	●
RB	**Marcus Marshall**	So.	5-10	212	
RB	**Clinton Lynch**	So.	6-0	187	●
RB	**Isiah Willis**	Sr.	5-9	193	●
WR	**Mikell Lands-Davis**	So.	5-11	208	
WR	**Ricky Jeune**	Jr.	6-3	212	●
C	**Freddie Burden**	Sr.	6-4	299	●
RG	**Shamire Devine**	Jr.	6-7	386	●
LG	**Will Bryan**	So.	6-4	281	
RT	**Trey Klock**	So.	6-4	285	
LT	**Eason Fromayan**	Jr.	6-4	285	
K	**Harrison Butker**	Sr.	6-3	210	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Rod Rook-Chungong**	Sr.	6-3	245	●
NT	**Francis Kallon**	Sr.	6-5	300	
DT	**Patrick Gamble**	Sr.	6-5	277	●
DE	**KeShun Freeman**	Jr.	6-1	250	●
LB	**Brant Mitchell**	So.	6-2	236	
LB	**P.J. Davis**	Sr.	5-11	231	●
LB	**Terrell Lewis**	Jr.	6-2	217	
CB	**Step Durham**	Jr.	5-11	194	
CB	**Lawrence Austin**	Jr.	5-9	185	●
SS	**Corey Griffin**	Jr.	6-2	195	
FS	**A.J. Gray**	So.	6-1	215	
P	**Ryan Rodwell**	Sr.	6-2	188	●

58

Thomas had 58 rushes for zero or negative yards in 2015, second most among Power 5 QBs.

STREETER LECKA/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.7 ● **FPI CHANCE GEORGIA TECH WINS**

9/3 vs. Boston College (Dublin, Ireland) **51%** ● **9/10** vs. Mercer **98%** ● **9/17** vs. Vanderbilt **66%**
9/22 vs. Clemson **12%** ● **10/1** vs. Miami (Fla.) **37%** ● **10/8** @ Pittsburgh **26%**
10/15 vs. Georgia Southern **78%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Duke **66%** ● **11/5** @ North Carolina **17%**
11/12 @ Virginia Tech **35%** ● **11/19** vs. Virginia **71%** ● **11/26** @ Georgia **14%**

*Adjusted to 61–44 by NCAA.

6 Duke

COACH David Cutcliffe (9th season)
48–53 (1–3 in bowl games)

How things have changed in Durham that, just four years removed from consecutive three-win seasons, a 7-5 record evoked mild disappointment. Of course, that was before the year closed with a 44-41 OT win over Indiana in the Pinstripe Bowl, Duke's first bowl triumph since the 1960 season. Now there's renewed hope that the Blue Devils can recapture the division crown. —J.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (4–4)
BOWL GAME New Era Pinstripe Bowl vs. Indiana, 44-41 W (OT)
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Thomas Sirk: 2,625 yards**
RUSHING **Thomas Sirk: 803 yards**
RECEIVING Max McCaffrey: 643 yards
TACKLES Dwayne Norman: 114
SACKS Jeremy Cash: 2½
INTERCEPTIONS **Breon Borders: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Shaun Wilson
With QB Thomas Sirk out indefinitely (ruptured left Achilles), the Blue Devils will expect greater contributions from their running backs, giving ample opportunity for Wilson to break big gains. The Pinstripe Bowl co-MVP had Duke's longest run of the season and averaged 5.9 ypc. The junior showed he's capable of scoring from anywhere on the field in the Blue Devils' 2015 finale, with an 85-yard rushing TD in the first quarter and a 98-yard kickoff TD return near game's end.

X-FACTOR DL coach Ben Albert
Pass-rush issues sank the defense last season (7.77 yards per attempt, third worst in the ACC), so Duke hired Ben Albert as D-line coach. At Boston College in 2013, Albert inherited a group that had six sacks the previous season but would go on to finish top five in the ACC in sacks the next three years. The best news for Blue Devils fans: Albert did it with under-the-radar talent similar to Duke's.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive end
Defensive tackle A.J. Wolf is the lone returning starter from the front four, and the staff is comfortable with the line's interior. So now Albert needs to identify a few defensive ends with pass-rush potential. Sophomore Marquies Price was the team's third-best pass rusher last season—faint praise, as he finished with just 1½ sacks. Allen Jackson and Dominic McDonald are upperclassmen, but they've combined for only 10 tackles in their careers. Keep an eye on redshirt freshman Trevon McSwain (6-6, 265 pounds).

THE PRESSER

Sirk was inconsistent in his first year as the starter (8 INTs in 12 games), but he is by far the most experienced QB on the roster. Junior Parker Boehme, who is expected to replace him, has one career start. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THE OFFENSE FARES WITHOUT SIRK?** "The system will work with whoever that guy is, but they also will manipulate their offense to that guy's skill set. They'll still be a factor because of Cut and his ability to coach and put kids in a good position to compete and perform and excel." —ACC defensive coach

The offense failed to produce a 1,000-yard receiver last season for the first time since 2011—graduated WR Max McCaffrey's 643 yards was the lowest team high since Cutcliffe's arrival. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DUKE'S RECEIVERS?** "They had some guys who were productive. McCaffrey was a good possession guy, but I felt like we matched up well scheme-wise with what they did, and I also felt good about the physical matchups." —ACC defensive coach

Through seven games, this defense was ranked No. 5 nationally in win probability added. Then the pass rush disappeared (three sacks in the final six games). Even so, the D has made significant strides under longtime Cutcliffe assistant Jim Knowles. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE DEFENSE COULD BE A STRENGTH ALL SEASON?** "It's as multiple a defense as there is in the conference, with many, many coverage units and zone pressures. They're a pain in the ass, to be quite honest." —ACC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Parker Boehme**	Jr.	6-2	220	●
RB	**Shaun Wilson**	Jr.	5-9	180	
WR	**Anthony Nash**	Sr.	6-5	200	●
WR	**T.J. Rahming**	So.	5-10	165	●
WR	**Scott Bracey**	Fr.	6-2	200	
TE	**Daniel Helm**	So.	6-4	240	
C	**Austin Davis**	Jr.	6-4	290	
RG	**Tanner Stone**	Sr.	6-6	300	●
LG	**Zach Baker**	RFr.	6-4	295	
RT	**Casey Blaser**	Sr.	6-5	290	●
LT	**Gabe Brandner**	Jr.	6-6	285	●
K	**Austin Reed**	Fr.	5-11	175	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Trevon McSwain**	RFr.	6-6	265	
NG	**A.J. Wolf**	Sr.	6-4	270	●
DT	**Mike Ramsay**	Jr.	6-2	295	
DE	**Marquies Price**	So.	6-6	210	
LB	**Tinashe Bere**	So.	6-1	230	●
LB	**Ben Humphreys**	So.	6-2	210	
DB	**Phillip Carter**	Jr.	6-1	195	
CB	**DeVon Edwards**	Sr.	5-9	180	●
CB	**Breon Borders**	Sr.	6-0	175	●
SS	**Corbin McCarthy**	Sr.	5-10	200	●
FS	**Deondre Singleton**	Sr.	5-11	180	●
P	**Austin Parker**	RFr.	6-1	180	

3

Edwards returned three kickoffs for TDs last year, tied for second most in the nation.

STEPHEN LEW/ICON SPORTSWIRE

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.0 ● FPI CHANCE DUKE WINS

9/3 vs. NC Central **98%** ● **9/10** vs. Wake Forest **57%** ● **9/17** @ Northwestern **38%**
9/24 @ Notre Dame **12%** ● **10/1** vs. Virginia **62%** ● **10/8** vs. Army **82%**
10/14 @ Louisville **10%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** @ Georgia Tech **34%** ● **11/5** vs. Virginia Tech **41%**
11/10 vs. North Carolina **25%** ● **11/19** @ Pittsburgh **21%** ● **11/26** @ Miami (Fla.) **18%**

7 Virginia

COACH Bronco Mendenhall (1st season)

Landing Bronco Mendenhall was a surprise, but the former BYU coach appears to be an ideal fit at Virginia—the structure and discipline he was known for at BYU will be equally valued here. There is talent on the roster, and coupled with a manageable conference schedule, it might provide Mendenhall the opportunity to qualify for a bowl in Year 1. —J.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 (3-5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Matt Johns: 2,810 yards**
RUSHING **Taquan Mizzell: 671 yards**
RECEIVING Canaan Severin: 759 yards
TACKLES **Micah Kiser: 117**
SACKS **Micah Kiser: 7½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Darious Latimore: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Taquan Mizzell
Mizzell led FBS backs with 75 catches and 721 yards. But Mendenhall teams like to hand the ball off; they're almost always in the top half of the FBS in rush attempts. So this fall, the 5-foot-10, 195-pound senior will need to prove he can increase his workload (he's never averaged more than 14 carries per game in a season). He'll have the benefit of an experienced offensive line, so expect him to improve on last season's 671 rushing yards (12th in the ACC) and 4.1 yards per carry (19th).

X-FACTOR DT Andrew Brown
Brown, along with safety Quin Blanding, was one of the five-star 2014 signees expected to flip the fortunes of Virginia, which was coming off a 2-10 season. But the DT spent his first two seasons in and out of the lineup with injuries, stunting his growth and impact. He's recorded a total of only 10 tackles in the past two seasons, never playing more than 10 games. Under Mendenhall, a former defensive coordinator, Brown should finally live up to his potential.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive line
Mendenhall is bringing a 3-4 scheme, and he's tasked with replacing a handful of starters along the defensive line. Brown's spot should be secure, but what pieces will surround him? While Andre Miles-Redmond has starting experience, how will he fare in a new scheme? Donte Wilkins and Chris Peace are two other contenders for starting positions, but don't expect a defined depth chart until well into preseason practice.

THE PRESSER

Few saw the Mendenhall hire coming, but Virginia fans are excited about the new coach's track record, which includes five seasons with double-digit wins and two conference championships at BYU. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MENDENHALL?** "I played against and watched him. The scheme is good and he's proven. He's a tremendous guy who gets a lot out of players. That's been a little bit of the issue for Virginia—they look the part but do not play the part. I'd like to have some of them dudes when you see them walk out of the tunnel." —ACC offensive coach

Quarterback problems have plagued the program, and Matt Johns, who likely will start for the second straight season, had his ups and downs in 2015. Johns had 20 TDs but threw 17 INTs (worst in the nation); he was picked off in 10 of 12 games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT JOHNS?** "I don't know if they can win with him. He's not a guy I'm willing to put a stamp on yet. He's got to prove it." —ACC offensive coach

The offense took a step forward in 2015—though it almost had to, after a particularly anemic unit in 2014. Over the final seven games, UVa scored 40 points twice, 30 points and 27 points. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPROVING OFFENSE?** "The cupboard's not bare at Virginia. They've traditionally had one of the better offensive lines that we've played. I think they've improved themselves at the skill positions, so it's going to be an interesting matchup." —ACC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Matt Johns**	Sr.	6-5	210	●
RB	**Taquan Mizzell**	Sr.	5-10	202	●
WR	**Olamide Zaccheaus**	So.	5-8	190	●
WR	**Andre Levrone**	Jr.	6-2	215	
WR	**Doni Dowling**	Jr.	6-1	215	
TE	**Evan Butts**	So.	6-4	240	
C	**Jackson Matteo**	Sr.	6-5	290	●
RG	**Jared Cohen**	So.	6-4	295	
LG	**Jack McDonald**	Jr.	6-5	290	●
RT	**Eric Smith**	Sr.	6-5	300	●
LT	**Michael Mooney**	Sr.	6-6	290	
K	**Dylan Sims**	Sr.	6-0	190	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Eli Hanback**	RFr.	6-4	285	
DT	**Donte Wilkins**	Jr.	6-1	290	
DT	**Andrew Brown**	Jr.	6-4	285	
OLB	**Cory Jones**	So.	6-5	215	
ILB	**Micah Kiser**	Jr.	6-2	240	●
ILB	**Zach Bradshaw**	Sr.	6-3	235	●
OLB	**Malcolm Cook**	Jr.	6-1	205	
CB	**Tim Harris**	Sr.	6-2	200	●
CB	**Juan Thornhill**	So.	6-1	200	
SS	**Kelvin Rainey**	Sr.	6-1	195	●
FS	**Quin Blanding**	Jr.	6-2	205	●
P	**Nicholas Conte**	Sr.	6-3	225	●

5 Five of Kiser's 7½ sacks in 2015 came on third down, fourth most in the ACC.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.6 ● **FPI CHANCE VIRGINIA WINS**

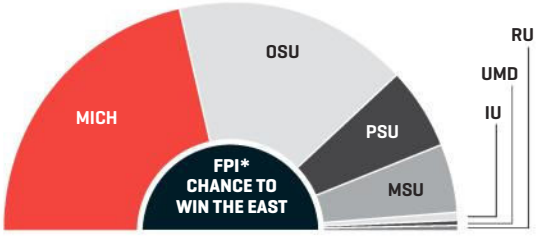
9/3 vs. Richmond **91%** ● **9/10** @ Oregon **14%** ● **9/17** @ Connecticut **54%**
9/24 vs. Central Michigan **69%** ● **10/1** @ Duke **38%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** vs. Pittsburgh **32%**
10/22 vs. North Carolina **22%** ● **10/29** vs. Louisville **18%** ● **11/5** @ Wake Forest **39%**
11/12 vs. Miami (Fla.) **29%** ● **11/19** @ Georgia Tech **29%** ● **11/26** @ Virginia Tech **25%**

LEE COLEMAN/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

BIG TE

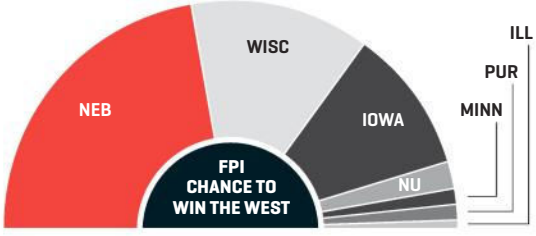
Big Ten outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
MICHIGAN	11	42.9%
OHIO STATE	17	33.7%
PENN STATE	35	11.7%
MICHIGAN STATE	34	11.0%
INDIANA	62	0.4%
MARYLAND	74	0.2%
RUTGERS	75	0.2%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
NEBRASKA	25	44.7%
WISCONSIN	31	25.7%
IOWA	38	20.6%
NORTHWESTERN	52	3.8%
MINNESOTA	65	2.4%
PURDUE	66	2.1%
ILLINOIS	73	0.9%



AVERAGE FPI RANK
47.0

PROJECTED CHAMPION
29%
MICHIGAN

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB	**J.T. Barrett**	Jr.	Ohio State

ALL-BIG TEN

QB	**J.T. Barrett**	Jr.	Ohio State
RB	**Saquon Barkley**	So.	Penn State
RB	**Corey Clement**	Sr.	Wisconsin
WR	**Jehu Chesson**	Sr.	Michigan
WR	**Jordan Westerkamp**	Sr.	Nebraska
TE	**Jake Butt**	Sr.	Michigan
OL	**Dan Feeney**	Sr.	Indiana
OL	**Pat Elflein**	Sr.	Ohio State
OL	**Brian Allen**	Jr.	Michigan State
OL	**Nick Gates**	So.	Nebraska
OL	**Mason Cole**	Jr.	Michigan

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

DT	**Malik McDowell**	Jr.	Michigan State

ALL-BIG TEN

DE	**Sam Hubbard**	So.	Ohio State
DE	**Chris Wormley**	Sr.	Michigan
DT	**Malik McDowell**	Jr.	Michigan State
LB	**Anthony Walker**	Jr.	Northwestern
LB	**Raekwon McMillan**	Jr.	Ohio State
LB	**Riley Bullough**	Sr.	Michigan State
LB	**Jabrill Peppers**	So.	Michigan
CB	**Desmond King**	Sr.	Iowa
CB	**Jourdan Lewis**	Sr.	Michigan
S	**Damarius Travis**	Sr.	Minnesota
S	**Nate Gerry**	Sr.	Nebraska

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Drew Brown**	Jr.	Nebraska
P	**Cameron Johnston**	Sr.	Ohio State
RS	**William Likely**	Sr.	Maryland

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER
- **9/3** Wisconsin vs. LSU (87*)
- **9/17** Ohio State @ Oklahoma (88)
- **9/24** Penn State @ Michigan (78)

OCTOBER
- **10/1** Wisconsin @ Michigan (79)
- **10/15** Ohio State @ Wisconsin (79)
- **10/29** Michigan @ Michigan State (78)

NOVEMBER
- **11/5** Nebraska @ Ohio State (80)
- **11/19** Ohio State @ Michigan State (77)
- **11/26** Michigan @ Ohio State (85)

*Matchup quality (0-100 scale) rates games based on team strength (FPI) and how close the contest is expected to be.

JAMIE SABAU/GETTY IMAGES

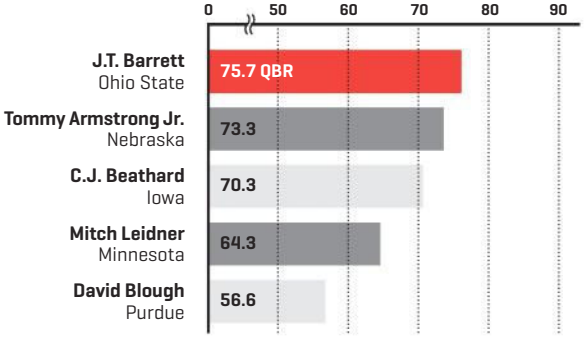
STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

The Big Ten is the only Power 5 conference outside the top 50 in SOS.

54 AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

The West is best—at least after Barrett, the Big Ten's only top-five returning passer, per QBR, who hails from the East.



J.T. Barrett

The Big Ten's most dangerous quarterback will command Columbus this fall. And he'll aim to take back the conference too.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Michigan

COACH Jim Harbaugh (2nd season)
10–3 (6–2 in bowl games)

The Jim Harbaugh effect is real. UM went from 5-7 under Brady Hoke in '14 to 10-3 last season, Harbaugh's first in Ann Arbor. In Year 2, it owns an edge in experience (15 returning starters) over fellow East powers Ohio State and Michigan State. Rejoice, Blue! Despite road trips to Columbus and East Lansing, Michigan has a strong shot at its first Big Ten title since '04. —Brian Bennett

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Buffalo Wild Wings Citrus Bowl vs. Florida, 41-7 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Jake Rudock: 3,017 yards
RUSHING **De'Veon Smith: 753 yards**
RECEIVING **Jehu Chesson: 764 yards**
TACKLES Joe Bolden: 83
SACKS **Chris Wormley: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Jeremy Clark: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Jabrill Peppers
Sure, as mentioned a time or two, the stud soph moved from safety to linebacker this spring, but positions are just labels for Peppers. The modern-day Charles Woodson will once again be a factor on offense (two rushing TDs in 2015) and on kick returns (27.9 yards per return on eight kickoffs last year). As Michigan looks to maximize his freakish athletic gifts, don't be surprised if his versatility begets Heisman talk.

X-FACTOR The freshmen
Harbaugh was busy in his first full recruiting cycle in Ann Arbor, signing ESPN's No. 6 overall class. The group includes the country's top overall prospect, DT Rashan Gary; ESPN 300 four-star RB Kareem Walker; and early enrollee Devin Bush Jr., who could start at linebacker from Day 1. The youngsters join a roster stocked with experienced talent, so if enough members of this class contribute right away, they could push the Wolverines over the top.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Houston transfer John O'Korn is the leader in the clubhouse to succeed a surprisingly solid Jake Rudock under center (81.3 QBR in 2015, No. 10 in the FBS), but he's a bit of a wild card. After throwing for 3,117 yards and 28 touchdowns in his AAC rookie-of-the-year campaign in 2013, he was benched five games—and eight interceptions—into 2014. Junior Shane Morris, who redshirted last year, and true freshman Brandon Peters (the No. 3 pro-style quarterback in the class of 2016) will push O'Korn throughout the summer.

THE PRESSER

The Wolverines averaged almost half a yard more per play (from 5.3 to 5.7) in 2015 than they did the prior year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPROVED OFFENSIVE LINE?** "This coaching staff knows how to mask things. It's a lot more double-team, a lot more movement, a lot more point-of-attack doubles and down blocks. They're a team that embraces the 4- and 5-yard play, and not a lot of people in college football do that anymore." —Big Ten defensive coach

Do-it-all Peppers and All-America CB Jourdan Lewis led the nation's stingiest secondary in 2015: 5.4 ypa, No. 1 in the FBS. Even after moving to strongside linebacker, Peppers should still factor in pass coverage. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO ATTACK PEPPERS?** "I would go and make him cover. When he just plays in the run game and downhill, he's going to make plays. He can cover a little bit, but you can get some separation." —Big Ten offensive coach

UM lost all three linebackers from '15, but the new guys will get help from a deep D-line. DT Ryan Glasgow will be fully healed from November shoulder surgery, and NT Bryan Mone is already back from a broken ankle in August. Add DEs Chris Wormley and Taco Charlton (12 total sacks) and UM might have the top DL anywhere. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE FRONT SEVEN?** "I thought the weakest part of their D last year was their linebackers. But with the guys they have up front, if they're healthy, you can get away with whatever at linebacker." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**John O'Korn**	Jr.	6-4	209	
RB	**De'Veon Smith**	Sr.	5-11	228	●
TE	**Ian Bunting**	So.	6-7	252	
WR	**Jehu Chesson**	Sr.	6-3	200	●
WR	**Amara Darboh**	Sr.	6-0	184	●
TE	**Jake Butt**	Sr.	6-6	250	●
C	**Mason Cole**	Jr.	6-5	305	●
RG	**Kyle Kalis**	Sr.	6-5	305	●
LG	**Ben Braden**	Sr.	6-6	322	●
RT	**Erik Magnuson**	Sr.	6-6	305	●
LT	**Grant Newsome**	So.	6-7	300	
K	**Kenny Allen**	Sr.	6-3	210	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Chris Wormley**	Sr.	6-3	303	●
DT	**Ryan Glasgow**	Sr.	6-4	300	●
NT	**Maurice Hurst**	Jr.	6-2	282	
DE	**Taco Charlton**	Sr.	6-5	265	
ILB	**Ben Gedeon**	Sr.	6-3	248	
ILB	**Mike McCray**	Jr.	6-4	240	
SLB	**Jabrill Peppers**	So.	6-1	208	●
CB	**Jourdan Lewis**	Sr.	5-10	175	●
CB	**Jeremy Clark**	Sr.	6-4	210	●
SS	**Delano Hill**	Sr.	6-0	212	●
FS	**Dymonte Thomas**	Sr.	6-2	195	
P	**Kenny Allen**	Sr.	6-3	210	

6

Butt is just the sixth tight end in UM history to amass 1,000-plus career yards.

LON HORWEDEL/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10 ● FPI CHANCE MICHIGAN WINS

9/3 vs. Hawaii **99%** ● **9/10** vs. Central Florida **97%** ● **9/17** vs. Colorado **90%**
9/24 vs. Penn State **77%** ● **10/1** vs. Wisconsin **73%** ● **10/8** @ Rutgers **85%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** vs. Illinois **93%** ● **10/29** @ Michigan State **63%** ● **11/5** vs. Maryland **92%**
11/12 @ Iowa **65%** ● **11/19** vs. Indiana **90%** ● **11/26** @ Ohio State **44%**

2 Ohio State

COACH Urban Meyer (5th season)
50–4 (3–1 in bowl games)

The Buckeyes' mass exodus of talent to the NFL makes them one of the most inexperienced squads in the country: eight returning starters in all. J.T. Barrett is back in Columbus, though, and talented if unproven blue chips abound. They'll be tested early—road-tripping to Norman, Oklahoma, in Week 3—and late, with an away date in East Lansing in November. —B.B.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12–1 (7–1)
BOWL GAME BattleFrog Fiesta Bowl vs. Notre Dame, 44-28 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Cardale Jones: 1,460 yards
RUSHING Ezekiel Elliott: 1,821 yards
RECEIVING Michael Thomas: 781 yards
TACKLES **Raekwon McMillan: 119**
SACKS **Tyquan Lewis: 8**
INTERCEPTIONS Tyvis Powell: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB J.T. Barrett
Barrett returns to lead an offense that will feature new faces just about everywhere else. The good news for the Buckeyes, at least, is that the junior quarterback boasts a penchant for finding the end zone: He chipped in 11 touchdowns in the air and another 11 on the ground last year despite splitting reps with the since-departed Cardale Jones for much of the season.

X-FACTOR WR Torrance Gibson
Thanks to the Buckeyes' wealth of passers in 2015, the former five-star QB prospect redshirted last year, then made the full-time switch to wideout. And with the departure of last season's leading WR trio—Michael Thomas, Jalin Marshall and Braxton Miller (1,599 receiving yards combined)—Gibson will have ample opportunity to earn playing time this fall. The Florida native is an elite athlete, and Barrett will need a weapon to help him shoulder the load.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Ezekiel Elliott left large cleats to fill, and not just because he ran for 3,699 yards, 41 TDs and 12 multiple-TD games in his past two seasons. He was also valued as a blocker. And while he was the only RB show in town for two years, the Buckeyes look primed to employ a tailback-by-committee approach this fall. Fifth-year senior Bri'onte Dunn and redshirt freshman Mike Weber will battle for the starting gig, but early enrollee Antonio Williams and hybrids Curtis Samuel and Dontre Wilson will merit attention too.

THE PRESSER

It's no secret that the Buckeyes will lean primarily on Barrett, but they'll hope for the 2014 version, when he posted an 87.1 QBR (No. 2 in the FBS). Last year, with the QB carousel spinning through October, he dipped to 75.7. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT BARRETT'S 2015 BACKSLIDE?** "J.T. is probably the prototype quarterback for what they want to do. But that guy was extremely accurate in 2014, and I didn't see that accuracy out of him last year." —Big Ten defensive coach

Urban Meyer's offenses operate best with a star at H-back—think Percy Harvin or Braxton Miller—and Samuel, a junior, might be next in line. He capitalized on limited action last year: Six of his 22 receptions went for 15-plus yards; five of his 17 rushes went for at least 10. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM SAMUEL?** "Every time we watched him on film, I thought he was a really good player who sure seemed to make a lot of plays. He has some of the versatility of Jalin Marshall and some of the positives of Ezekiel Elliott too." —Big Ten defensive coach

Like the offense, the D has one bona fide star: junior LB Raekwon McMillan. So who will replace TFL magnet Joey Bosa (16 last year) in the trenches? His sub-in from '15 is no slouch; soph DE Sam Hubbard racked up 6½ sacks last year—1½ more than Bosa. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT REPLACING BOSA?** "Hubbard is a future big-time NFL player. He was a true freshman last year, and he was great against Notre Dame in the bowl game." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**J.T. Barrett**	Jr.	6-2	225	●
RB	**Mike Weber**	RFr.	5-10	215	
HB	**Curtis Samuel**	Jr.	5-11	196	
WR	**Corey Smith**	Sr.	6-1	195	
WR	**Noah Brown**	So.	6-2	222	
TE	**Marcus Baugh**	Jr.	6-5	255	
C	**Pat Elflein**	Sr.	6-3	300	●
RG	**Billy Price**	Jr.	6-4	312	●
LG	**Michael Jordan**	Fr.	6-7	316	
RT	**Isaiah Prince**	So.	6-7	305	
LT	**Jamarco Jones**	Jr.	6-5	306	
K	**Sean Nuernberger**	Jr.	6-1	220	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Sam Hubbard**	So.	6-5	265	
DT	**Tracy Sprinkle**	Jr.	6-3	290	
DT	**Michael Hill**	Jr.	6-3	295	
DE	**Tyquan Lewis**	Jr.	6-4	260	●
WLB	**Dante Booker**	Jr.	6-3	232	
MLB	**Raekwon McMillan**	Jr.	6-2	240	●
SLB	**Chris Worley**	Jr.	6-2	222	
CB	**Gareon Conley**	Jr.	6-0	195	●
CB	**Marshon Lattimore**	So.	6-0	195	
S	**Cam Burrows**	Jr.	6-0	208	
S	**Malik Hooker**	So.	6-2	205	
P	**Cameron Johnston**	Sr.	5-11	195	●

McMillan had double-digit tackles in three games in 2015 and nine tackles in three more.

JAY LAPRETE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.8 ● FPI CHANCE OHIO STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Bowling Green **95%** ● **9/10** vs. Tulsa **92%** ● **9/17** @ Oklahoma **19%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** vs. Rutgers **93%** ● **10/8** vs. Indiana **89%** ● **10/15** @ Wisconsin **52%**
10/22 @ Penn State **57%** ● **10/29** vs. Northwestern **86%** ● **11/5** vs. Nebraska **69%**
11/12 @ Maryland **84%** ● **11/19** @ Michigan State **60%** ● **11/26** vs. Michigan **56%**

3 Penn State

COACH James Franklin (3rd season)
14–12 (1–1 in bowl games)

After back-to-back 7-6 campaigns, a seriously stagnant offense and a rocky offseason punctuated by two assistant coaches departing, James Franklin is starting to feel the heat in Happy Valley. He's banking on a new offensive approach and promising young talent to help the Nittany Lions compete in the loaded Big Ten East—but they still look like a tier below in 2016. —B.B.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (4–4)
BOWL GAME TaxSlayer Bowl vs. Georgia, 24-17 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Christian Hackenberg: 2,525 yards
RUSHING **Saquon Barkley: 1,076 yards**
RECEIVING **Chris Godwin: 1,101 yards**
TACKLES **Jason Cabinda: 100**
SACKS Carl Nassib: 15½
INTERCEPTIONS **John Reid: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Saquon Barkley
As a true freshman in 2015, Barkley was a sensation on an otherwise abysmal offense, running for 1,076 yards and seven touchdowns. He put up those totals and averaged 5.9 ypc despite sitting two games with injury and getting just one carry and 1 yard in the opener at Temple. He was a home run threat too: His 15 runs of 20-plus yards last year was tied for sixth most in the Power 5.

X-FACTOR New OC Joe Moorhead
Franklin went bold in hiring Moorhead, the former Fordham head coach, to revitalize a feeble offensive attack (133.9 rush ypg in 2015, No. 105 in the FBS; 214.5 pass ypg, No. 74; 23.2 ppg, No. 101). The new offensive coordinator employs a no-huddle spread that aims to run at least 75 offensive snaps per game. Penn State averaged just 63.8 last season, fewest in the Big Ten.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Three-year starter Christian Hackenberg departed early for the NFL after two frustrating seasons behind an understocked line in Franklin's system. Hackenberg was durable, attempting all but 75 of PSU's 1,310 passes since '13, making his absence a gaping hole under center. Sophomore Trace McSorley led an inspired comeback attempt (two fourth-quarter TD passes) in last year's bowl loss vs. Georgia after Hackenberg got hurt, so he has a slight edge for the job despite just 13 regular-season attempts. Redshirt freshman Tommy Stevens and early enrollee Jake Zembiec are also fits in Moorhead's new system.

THE PRESSER

The Nittany Lions return four starters on the offensive line in 2016, which ... might not be a good thing. The unit allowed 83 sacks the past two years combined, third most in the Power 5. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ANY IMPROVEMENT ALONG THE O-LINE?** "Maybe if they've got a quarterback who can move a hell of a lot better, [the problems] are not as obvious. Maybe spreading it out and moving it more laterally will help them, because I'm not sure they're going to move a whole lot of people up front." —Big Ten defensive coach

Penn State is deep at wideout, led by junior Chris Godwin (12 catches of 30-plus yards in 2015, T4 in the Power 5). But even with playmakers in the unit, the Lions managed just 20 TDs in the air last year, tied for 61st in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE WRs?** "Our big concern with them was always Hackenberg. Not to say we disrespected their receivers, but we didn't do anything different against them. We didn't have any real fear of their receivers." —Big Ten defensive coach

Bob Shoop, the mastermind behind a PSU D that gave up 4.3 ypp in '14 (No. 3 in the FBS) and 4.8 ypp in '15 (No. 14), left for Tennessee. Gone too are QB terror Carl Nassib (four multi-sack games in '15) and all-Big Ten DTs Austin Johnson and Anthony Zettel. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE NEW-LOOK D?** "It will be interesting to see what they do differently schematically. They're just OK at 'backer, not what they have been. I'd much rather play them now after they lost those three guys." —Big Ten offensive coach

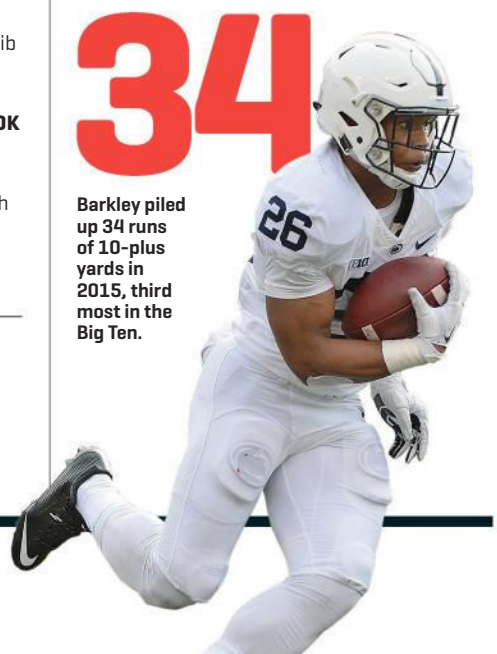
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Trace McSorley**	So.	6-0	196	
RB	**Saquon Barkley**	So.	5-11	222	●
WR	**DaeSean Hamilton**	Jr.	6-1	206	●
WR	**Chris Godwin**	Jr.	6-1	208	●
WR	**Saeed Blacknall**	Jr.	6-2	210	●
TE	**Mike Gesicki**	Jr.	6-6	255	●
C	**Brian Gaia**	Sr.	6-3	304	●
RG	**Brendan Mahon**	Jr.	6-4	318	●
LG	**Ryan Bates**	RFr.	6-4	305	
RT	**Noah Beh**	So.	6-6	292	●
LT	**Andrew Nelson**	Jr.	6-6	302	●
K	**Tyler Davis**	Jr.	5-11	186	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Evan Schwan**	Sr.	6-6	255	
NG	**Parker Cothren**	Jr.	6-4	302	
DT	**Kevin Givens**	RFr.	6-1	280	
DE	**Garrett Sickels**	Jr.	6-4	258	●
WLB	**Jason Cabinda**	Jr.	6-1	245	●
MLB	**Nyeem Wartman-White**	Sr.	6-1	243	
SLB	**Brandon Bell**	Sr.	6-1	231	●
CB	**Grant Haley**	Jr.	5-9	189	●
CB	**John Reid**	So.	5-10	186	
SS	**Malik Golden**	Sr.	6-0	205	
FS	**Marcus Allen**	Jr.	6-2	209	●
P	**Daniel Pasquariello**	Jr.	6-1	197	●

34

Barkley piled up 34 runs of 10-plus yards in 2015, third most in the Big Ten.



CHRIS BERNACCHI/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.7 ● **FPI CHANCE PENN STATE WINS**

9/3 vs. Kent State **94%** ● **9/10** @ Pittsburgh **37%** ● **9/17** vs. Temple **79%**
9/24 @ Michigan **23%** ● **10/1** vs. Minnesota **81%** ● **10/8** vs. Maryland **82%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** vs. Ohio State **43%** ● **10/29** @ Purdue **67%** ● **11/5** vs. Iowa **59%**
11/12 @ Indiana **65%** ● **11/19** @ Rutgers **71%** ● **11/26** vs. Michigan State **58%**

4 Michigan State

COACH Mark Dantonio (10th season)
87–33 (4–5 in bowl games)

On the heels of an unprecedented run in East Lansing—MSU has reached double-digit wins in five of its past six seasons—the Spartans must now replace several cornerstone players, including their all-time winningest QB. An encore playoff appearance might be a reach, but they draw Michigan and Ohio State at home, so they'll contend (again) for Big Ten East bragging rights. —B.B.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12–2 (7–1)
BOWL GAME Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic (CFP semifinal) vs. Alabama, 38–0 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Connor Cook: 3,131 yards
RUSHING **LJ Scott: 699 yards**
RECEIVING Aaron Burbridge: 1,258 yards
TACKLES **Riley Bullough: 106**
SACKS Shilique Calhoun: 10½
INTERCEPTIONS **Montae Nicholson: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DT Malik McDowell
Alongside Shilique Calhoun, the 6-foot-6, 280-pound McDowell hounded quarterbacks throughout 2015 to the tune of 4½ sacks and eight QB hurries. With Calhoun now preparing to play on Sundays, McDowell's continued production is vital to a team that relies on stopping the run first—the Spartans' defense has ranked in the top 25 in ypc allowed every year since '11. His two forced fumbles and one pick returned for a TD were a bonus.

X-FACTOR CB Vayante Copeland
The sophomore drew favorable comparisons to former Spartan Darqueze Dennard (MSU's first-ever DB to take home the Jim Thorpe Award) last summer. He looked ready to take the reins as the Spartans' next lockdown corner in Week 1 (2 TFLs, 1 INT) but was lost for the season after fracturing a vertebra in his neck in Week 2. If Copeland is 100 percent healthy this fall, he'll be instrumental in reinstituting Sparty's "No Fly Zone." Two years after allowing 5.2 ypa (No. 2 in the FBS), Michigan State gave up two more yards per attempt in 2015 (No. 78).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Mainstay Connor Cook (39 starts in three years) is gone, so coach Mark Dantonio will decide between senior Tyler O'Connor and junior Damion Terry (80 combined career pass attempts). They are both more mobile than their predecessor (116 yards rushing combined in '15, compared with Cook's 56), but O'Connor, with a pro style that Dantonio favors, might hold the edge.

THE PRESSER

The Spartans platooned three running backs who ran for 500-plus yards apiece in 2015, headlined by sophomore LJ Scott, who barreled into the end zone to cap a Big Ten title-winning 22-play, 82-yard drive over Iowa. Scott was also one of just 13 Power 5 backs to score at least two rushing TDs in four-plus games last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SCOTT'S STRENGTHS?** "He's not a speed guy [4.6-4.7 40 range] who is going to beat you east and west, but he fits their offense. ... That big, downhill, bruiser type of guy." —Big Ten defensive coach

MSU QBs saw pressure on just 23.4 percent of dropbacks, No. 17 in the Power 5, thanks to an unyielding O-line. While three starters are gone (including All-Americans Jack Allen and Jack Conklin), the Spartans had to use seven different combinations up front in '15 due to injury, so the backups have experience. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LINE'S FORECAST?** "Michigan State was about the best offensive line that we saw last year. They mauled you. I would expect that they'll have a good line, I'm just not sure it will be a great one like they had without those two guys." —Big Ten defensive coach

McDowell shined in some of Sparty's biggest wins in '15, especially as a force in key goal-line stops vs. Oregon and at Michigan. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO HANDLE McDOWELL?** "It's so unusual for an inside guy to have that size and speed. Double-teaming him is the way to go. He is a problem one-on-one." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Tyler O'Connor**	Sr.	6-3	222	
RB	**LJ Scott**	So.	6-0	238	●
WR	**Felton Davis III**	So.	6-4	198	
WR	**Donnie Corley**	Fr.	6-3	185	
WR	**R.J. Shelton**	Sr.	5-11	205	
TE	**Josiah Price**	Sr.	6-4	260	●
C	**Brian Allen**	Jr.	6-2	303	●
RG	**David Beedle**	So.	6-5	310	
LG	**Benny McGowan**	Sr.	6-3	327	
RT	**Kodi Kieler**	Sr.	6-6	310	●
LT	**Dennis Finley**	Jr.	6-6	282	
K	**Michael Geiger**	Sr.	5-8	183	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Demetrius Cooper**	Jr.	6-5	252	
NT	**Malik McDowell**	Jr.	6-6	280	●
DT	**Damon Knox**	Sr.	6-5	270	
DE	**Josh King**	Fr.	6-6	230	
SLB	**Chris Frey**	Jr.	6-2	222	
MLB	**Riley Bullough**	Sr.	6-2	230	●
OLB	**Jon Reschke**	Jr.	6-2	228	●
CB	**Vayante Copeland**	So.	6-0	197	
CB	**Darian Hicks**	Sr.	5-10	180	●
SS	**Montae Nicholson**	Jr.	6-2	220	●
FS	**Demetrious Cox**	Sr.	6-1	198	●
P	**Jake Hartbarger**	So.	6-4	207	●

6

Scott's six rush TDs in the fourth quarter or OT was tied for second most among Power 5 backs.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.0 ● **FPI CHANCE MICHIGAN STATE WINS**

9/2 vs. Furman **99%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** @ Notre Dame **29%**
9/24 vs. Wisconsin **54%** ● **10/1** @ Indiana **67%** ● **10/8** vs. BYU **72%** ● **10/15** vs. Northwestern **72%**
10/22 @ Maryland **71%** ● **10/29** vs. Michigan **37%** ● **11/5** @ Illinois **71%**
11/12 vs. Rutgers **84%** ● **11/19** vs. Ohio State **40%** ● **11/26** @ Penn State **42%**

5 Indiana

COACH Kevin Wilson (6th season)
20–41 (0–1 in bowl games)

The long Bloomington nightmare is over. After seven straight seasons without a bowl (and a 13-year drought before a reprieve in '07), the Hoosiers finally made the postseason last year. Is a second straight bowl berth in store? The bad news: IU is still trying to cobble together a respectable D for the first time in years. The good: Its 2016 noncon foes averaged 3.7 wins last year. —B.B.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 (2–6)
BOWL GAME New Era Pinstripe Bowl vs. Duke, 44-41 L (OT)
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Nate Sudfeld: 3,573 yards
RUSHING Jordan Howard: 1,213 yards
RECEIVING **Simmie Cobbs Jr.: 1,035 yards**
TACKLES **Marcus Oliver: 112**
SACKS Nick Mangieri: 9½
INTERCEPTIONS **Jonathan Crawford: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Simmie Cobbs Jr.
The lanky 6-foot-4 junior finished last season strong (four 100-plus-yard games in his final seven) to become just the sixth Hoosiers wideout to eclipse the 1,000-yard mark. With strong-armed juco transfer Richard Lagow taking the reins under center, Cobbs' ability to stretch the field (17.3 ypc, No. 22 in the Power 5) should help smooth the transition.

X-FACTOR New DC Tom Allen
Here's how dire Indiana's defensive straits are: Allen is the fifth defensive coordinator (or co-coordinator) under sixth-year head coach Kevin Wilson. Since 2004, the Hoosiers rank 116th in the FBS in yards allowed. Holding to tradition, Indiana was one of just 10 FBS programs in 2015 to surrender 500-plus ypg, as opposing offenses scored at will (31 two-minute TD drives, second most in the Power 5). If Allen can upgrade the unit to merely serviceable, the Hoosiers could have another bowl-eligible year in their sights. Here's the challenge: He brings an Ole Miss–like 4-2-5 scheme to Bloomington ... minus the Ole Miss–like talent.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive line
Moving from a three- to a four-man front will be challenging, especially after the loss of four of the top five D-linemen. With three starts in 2015, senior Ralph Green III has the most experience and might be penciled in as one DT. Junior Robert McCray III will also compete for time inside with Nate Hoff, who had only four tackles as a sophomore after making 29 as a freshman.

THE PRESSER

Indiana has quietly churned out a physical running attack of late, with 2,000-yard rusher Tevin Coleman in 2014 and a pair of 1,000-yard backs in 2015 (Jordan Howard and Devine Redding). Howard departs, but Redding, a junior, returns to Bloomington, where he should build on his 31 runs of 10-plus yards from last year (T25 among Power 5 rushers). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE GROUND GAME HAS IMPROVED?** "The way they run their split-zone play and how they utilize their backs is absolutely incredible. It was way better than anybody else, and they ran it with such precision and tremendous angles." —Big Ten defensive coach

Even with IU's runners, the Hoosiers' hallmark and primary advantage in league play has been pace. Last year they averaged 81 snaps per game, eight more than the next-busiest Big Ten team, Nebraska. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT INDIANA'S TEMPO?** "They're unique in our league in that they're going to try to get 100 plays in a game and just literally outscore you." —Big Ten defensive coach

Indiana gave up more points (37.6 ppg) than all but 11 FBS programs last year. Allen's 4-2-5 defense aims to stanch that bleeding, especially in the air, where the Hoosiers allowed 32 TDs (fourth most in the nation). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE SWITCH TO A 4-2-5 MAY HELP?** "They gave up a lot of big plays in their secondary. Their thing may be: 'Can people get ready for the 4-2-5 in a week?' And maybe that will give them an edge." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Richard Lagow**	Jr.	6-6	240	
RB	**Devine Redding**	Jr.	5-10	205	
WR	**Ricky Jones**	Sr.	5-10	184	●
WR	**Simmie Cobbs Jr.**	Jr.	6-4	220	●
WR	**Mitchell Paige**	Sr.	5-7	175	●
TE	**Danny Friend**	Jr.	6-5	260	
C	**Wes Rogers**	Sr.	6-4	305	
RG	**Dan Feeney**	Sr.	6-4	310	●
LG	**Wes Martin**	So.	6-3	310	●
RT	**Dimitric Camiel**	Sr.	6-7	310	●
LT	**Brandon Knight**	So.	6-5	290	
K	**Griffin Oakes**	Jr.	5-10	200	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Jacob Robinson**	So.	6-4	277	
DT	**Nate Hoff**	Jr.	6-2	302	
DT	**Robert McCray III**	Jr.	6-2	274	
DE	**Greg Gooch**	Jr.	6-2	257	
WLB	**Marcus Oliver**	Jr.	6-1	236	●
MLB	**Tegray Scales**	Jr.	6-0	227	●
NB	**Will Dawkins**	So.	5-11	202	●
CB	**Rashard Fant**	Jr.	5-10	174	●
CB	**Tyler Green**	So.	6-3	193	●
SS	**Jonathan Crawford**	So.	6-2	194	●
FS	**Chase Dutra**	Jr.	6-1	199	●
P	**Joseph Gedeon**	So.	6-3	193	

16

Cobbs reeled in 16 catches of 25-plus yards in '15, the most of any current Big Ten receiver.

LANCE KING/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.4 ● FPI CHANCE INDIANA WINS

9/1 @ Florida International **78%** ● **9/10** vs. Ball State **87%** ● **9/17** BYE ● **9/24** vs. Wake Forest **59%**
10/1 vs. Michigan State **34%** ● **10/8** @ Ohio State **11%** ● **10/15** vs. Nebraska **25%**
10/22 @ Northwestern **36%** ● **10/29** vs. Maryland **65%** ● **11/5** @ Rutgers **43%**
11/12 vs. Penn State **35%** ● **11/19** @ Michigan **10%** ● **11/26** vs. Purdue **59%**

6 Maryland

COACH D.J. Durkin (1st season)

After losing 11 of its past 13 games vs. FBS foes, Maryland is starting over with former Michigan defensive coordinator D.J. Durkin at the helm. He inherits a pair of QBs who were historically bad in 2015, so even with a friendly noncon lineup, a bowl looks out of reach. Simply put, Durkin needs more than one year to recruit the fertile DMV to turn the Terrapins around. —B.B.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Perry Hills: 1,001 yards**
RUSHING Brandon Ross: 958 yards
RECEIVING **Levern Jacobs: 425 yards**
TACKLES **Jermaine Carter Jr.: 103**
SACKS Yannick Ngakoue: 13½
INTERCEPTIONS Sean Davis: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON CB William Likely
He's only 5-foot-7, but Likely is a big play waiting to happen. The Big Ten returner of the year in 2015, he led the nation in combined return yards (1,197), averaged 17.7 yards per punt return and brought two punts and one kickoff back for TDs. On a team lacking explosiveness (14 team receptions of 25-plus yards in 2015, T121 in the FBS), Likely provided a welcome burst. Oh, and he's also the team's star defender and lone defensive back returning to the Terps' secondary.

X-FACTOR The Jacobs brothers
Wide receivers Levern and Taivon Jacobs have speed and skill, but the Terps are still awaiting the duo's breakout. Levern, a senior, was suspended for 2014 for violating the student code of conduct; Taivon, a junior, missed the same season with a knee injury. Last year Maryland's QBs struggled to get the ball to anyone but opposing defenders (29 INTs, six more than any other FBS team). The QBs must find the Jacobses more often for the new up-tempo attack to take flight in '16.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
The Terps' pass game was so bad (37.6 QBR, No. 106 in the FBS) that Maryland all but abandoned it. So those aforementioned 29 picks? Even more mind-boggling considering this wasn't a high-volume passing team (387 attempts, No. 82). Seniors Perry Hills (eight starts) and Caleb Rowe (four) must improve to ward off redshirt freshman Gage Shaffer and incoming freshman Tyrrell Pigrome. Otherwise, this spot breaks wide open.

THE PRESSER

OC Walt Bell arrives from Arkansas State, where he ran a fast-paced system heavy on the screen game, O-line shifts and outside runs with pulling linemen. The Red Wolves rang up 40.0 ppg in '15 (No. 12 in the FBS), a world away from the Terps' 24.7 (T95). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THE UP-TEMPO WILL TRANSLATE?** "I don't think they can hold up up front because they're not going to have the linemen. When you can't block 'em, the best thing you can do is slow 'em down with some screens and QB runs." —Big Ten defensive coach

Hills was effective on the ground last year (three games of 100-plus yards rushing), but his 40.2 QBR (No. 108 in the FBS), 50 percent completion rate (No. 115) and 0.62 TD-INT rate (T117) were killers. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HILLS?** "He runs well enough that we couldn't catch him. I don't know that he's going to stand in there and beat you throwing seven cuts. But this offense might fit him a little bit." —Big Ten defensive coach

Likely is a star (he earned a first-team All-Big Ten nod in '14 with 6 INTs), and opposing QBs most often avoid throwing his way. But while he amassed 11 pass breakups last year, he failed to grab a pick. His secondary got burned in 2015, giving up 50 receptions of 20-plus yards (T104 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LIKELY'S VULNERABILITY?** "He's a really good athlete, but as far as a cover corner, we made a lot of big plays going over the top of him. Size does give him a problem." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Perry Hills**	Sr.	6-2	210	●
RB	**Wes Brown**	Sr.	6-0	210	
WR	**D.J. Moore**	So.	5-11	205	●
WR	**Levern Jacobs**	Sr.	5-11	185	●
WR	**Taivon Jacobs**	Jr.	5-9	165	●
TE	**Avery Edwards**	So.	6-4	245	●
C	**Brendan Moore**	So.	6-3	295	
RG	**Damian Prince**	So.	6-3	325	●
LG	**Quarvez Boulware**	RFr.	6-2	304	
RT	**Derwin Gray**	So.	6-5	328	
LT	**Michael Dunn**	Sr.	6-5	312	●
K	**Adam Greene**	Jr.	5-11	185	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Roman Braglio**	Sr.	6-2	262	●
DT	**David Shaw**	So.	6-4	308	
DT	**Azubuike Ukandu**	Sr.	6-0	306	●
DE	**Jesse Aniebonam**	Jr.	6-3	260	
WLB	**Shane Cockerille**	Jr.	6-2	235	●
MLB	**Jermaine Carter Jr.**	Jr.	6-0	240	●
SLB	**Melvin Keihn**	So.	6-1	211	
CB	**William Likely**	Sr.	5-7	175	●
CB	**Alvin Hill**	Sr.	6-0	200	
SS	**Denzel Conyers**	Sr.	6-3	216	
FS	**Josh Woods**	Jr.	6-1	202	
P	**Wade Lees**	Fr.	6-2	204	●

400

Likely is the only player in the past five years with at least 400 kickoff and punt return yards in the same season.

PATRICK SEMANSKY/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.3 ● **FPI CHANCE MARYLAND WINS**

9/3 vs. Howard **99%** ● **9/9** @ Florida International **73%** ● **9/17** @ Central Florida **66%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** vs. Purdue **59%** ● **10/8** @ Penn State **18%** ● **10/15** vs. Minnesota **55%**
10/22 vs. Michigan State **29%** ● **10/29** @ Indiana **36%** ● **11/5** @ Michigan **8%**
11/12 vs. Ohio State **16%** ● **11/19** @ Nebraska **12%** ● **11/26** vs. Rutgers **58%**

7 Rutgers

COACH Chris Ash (1st season)

A 2015 disaster—one conference victory (lowly Indiana) and four wins total (lowlier Norfolk State, Kansas and Army)—begat a housecleaning in Piscataway. Former Ohio State DC Chris Ash was brought in to clean up the mess, but he isn't left with much. And with the Big Ten moving to a nine-game conference slate in '16, another basement-dwelling season looks likely. —B.B.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4-8 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Chris Laviano: 2,247 yards**
RUSHING **Robert Martin: 763 yards**
RECEIVING Leonte Carroo: 809 yards
TACKLES Steve Longa: 117
SACKS **Quanzell Lambert: 2½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Anthony Cioffi: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DT Darius Hamilton
The captain—and 2014 team defensive MVP when he had 11½ TFLs and six sacks—was shut down for the season in Week 3 last year after a lingering knee injury failed to heal. Not coincidentally, Rutgers' run defense fell off a cliff in conference play: a Big Ten-worst 5.7 ypc; four games allowing 250-plus rush yards, tied for seventh worst in the Power 5; and a 64.2 percent third-down conversion rate on runs, third worst in the FBS. Hamilton will help stabilize the defensive front, especially if the senior returns to 2014 form.

X-FACTOR DE Kemoko Turay
The freakishly athletic pass rusher emerged as a redshirt freshman in 2014, making 7½ sacks and blocking three kicks, including one to beat Michigan. Then he all but disappeared in '15. While coping with nagging injuries, Turay chipped in just nine tackles and two sacks in his 11 game appearances. The new staff's ability to harness his 2014-level play will be crucial for a team that sorely missed a pass rush last year. Rutgers managed only 14 sacks (T120 in the FBS), fewer than the nation's leading sack artist, Penn State's Carl Nassib, totaled on his own (15½).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Junior Chris Laviano beat out LSU transfer Hayden Rettig last year but was unspectacular: 16 TDs to 12 INTs. A new staff brings fresh competition. While Rettig boasts the bigger arm, Rutgers' offensive shift from pro-style to power spread (think Ohio State) might favor the slightly more mobile Laviano.

THE PRESSER

Ash tapped Drew Mehringer, a Tom Herman disciple, to run the aforementioned power spread, which emphasizes inside zone runs. He inherits a pair of 650-plus-yard RBs in juniors Robert Martin and Josh Hicks, but can the O-line pave the way? Knights runners averaged 2.0 yards before contact, 11th in the Big Ten. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE POWER SPREAD?** "Coach Herman's system—whether at Rice, Iowa State, Ohio State or Houston—has proven to be solid. They have running backs that can all play, but I'd worry about that O-line. We imposed our will a little bit against them." —Big Ten defensive coach

Laviano is as close to a dual threat as the Rutgers roster gets, but thanks to 24 sacks, he still finished 2015 with minus-38 rushing yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LAVIANO'S DOWNSIDE?** "He either sees the rush or doesn't see it at all. There was no in-between. He struggled with recognition of what was coming at him ... so we knew he was going to get whacked a lot." —Big Ten defensive coach

Ash's defensive scheme relies on playing press man coverage with long corners, which Rutgers looks to have in 6-foot-1 sophs Isaiah Wharton and Blessuan Austin. They're young but combined for 22 starts and 14 passes broken up in '15. The key will be to recruit similar talent in the future. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PERSONNEL FITS?** "I don't see his defense being much different than it was at Ohio State, Arkansas and Wisconsin. But he doesn't have an East Coast staff and he's not an East Coast guy." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Chris Laviano**	Jr.	6-2	210	●
RB	**Robert Martin**	Jr.	5-11	205	●
WR	**Janarion Grant**	Sr.	5-10	176	●
WR	**Carlton Agudosi**	Sr.	6-6	220	
WR	**Andre Patton**	Sr.	6-3	205	●
TE	**Nick Arcidiacono**	Sr.	6-4	240	●
C	**Derrick Nelson**	Sr.	6-3	295	●
RG	**Chris Muller**	Sr.	6-6	319	●
LG	**Dorian Miller**	Jr.	6-2	292	●
RT	**J.J. Denman**	Sr.	6-5	305	●
LT	**Tariq Cole**	So.	6-6	314	
K	**David Bonagura**	Jr.	6-0	245	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Quanzell Lambert**	Sr.	6-1	260	●
DT	**Darius Hamilton**	Sr.	6-3	283	
DT	**Sebastian Joseph**	Jr.	6-4	295	●
DE	**Julian Pinnix-Odrick**	Sr.	6-5	275	●
WLB	**Deonte Roberts**	So.	6-1	234	
MLB	**Solomon Manning**	Fr.	6-1	222	
SLB	**Najee Clayton**	So.	6-1	217	
CB	**Isaiah Wharton**	So.	6-1	204	●
CB	**Blessuan Austin**	So.	6-1	195	●
SS	**Anthony Cioffi**	Sr.	6-0	200	●
FS	**Saquan Hampton**	So.	6-1	199	●
P	**Michael Cintron**	So.	6-3	219	

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.8 ● **FPI CHANCE RUTGERS WINS**

9/3 @ Washington **7%** ● **9/10** vs. Howard **99%** ● **9/17** vs. New Mexico **79%**
9/24 vs. Iowa **33%** ● **10/1** @ Ohio State **8%** ● **10/8** vs. Michigan **15%**
10/15 vs. Illinois **59%** ● **10/22** @ Minnesota **35%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Indiana **57%**
11/12 @ Michigan State **16%** ● **11/19** vs. Penn State **29%** ● **11/26** @ Maryland **42%**

6

Grant was one of six players in the past 10 years to return a kick-off and a punt for a TD in the same game.

RICH SCHULTZ/GETTY IMAGES

1 Nebraska

COACH Mike Riley (2nd season)
6–7 (1–0 in bowl games)

The ball is bound to bounce their way sooner or later, right? Six of their seven losses came by eight points or fewer, so the tested Huskers (15 returning starters) could vie again for nine wins—a benchmark they reached or surpassed for seven straight years before 2015. Nebraska hosts Oregon early, but a forgiving Big Ten West slate should help its cause. —Mitch Sherman

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 (3–5)
BOWL GAME Foster Farms Bowl
vs. UCLA, 37-29 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Tommy Armstrong Jr.: 3,030 yards**
RUSHING **Terrell Newby: 765 yards**
RECEIVING **Jordan Westerkamp: 918 yards**
TACKLES **Nate Gerry: 79**
SACKS **Freedom Akinmoladun: 4½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Nate Gerry: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Tommy Armstrong Jr.
The three-year starter is a weapon on the ground—he has run for 50-plus yards 11 times in his career—but can be a liability through the air. Armstrong threw a career-high 16 INTs last year, bolstered by OC Danny Langsdorf's tendency to overextend his QB's range. The game plan in '16? Return to the 2015 season finale's formula vs. UCLA, when he attempted 19 passes (compared with his 33.5 season average) but completed 63.2 percent of those throws (2015 average: 55.2).

X-FACTOR WR De'Mornay Pierson-El
Chalk up last season to a lost year for the speedy junior. Sidelined with foot and knee injuries, he appeared in just five games, managing 19 touches all fall. But before he was a nonfactor, Pierson-El flashed his game-breaking ability as a freshman in '14, totaling 596 punt-return yards—164 more than any other *team* nationally. If he returns to the roster in good health, Nebraska's already robust wideout group (each of its top four WRs from last year returns) gets an instant infusion.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive tackle
The heart of the D-line, which helped the Huskers hold opponents to 109.8 rush ypg in 2015 (No. 9 in the FBS), sustained major blows: Maliek Collins and Vincent Valentine declared early for the draft, and senior Greg McMullen, a regular on the edge last year (nine starts at DE, four at DT), ended his career to focus on grad school. Senior Kevin Maurice has experience, but the Huskers could go young with twin redshirt freshmen Carlos and Khalil Davis.

THE PRESSER

Armstrong grabs headlines, but Nebraska's receiving corps, led by senior trio Jordan Westerkamp, Brandon Reilly and Alonzo Moore (2,067 combined yards in '15), form the offense's most reliable unit. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO DEFEND THE PASS?** "Our thought process was, 'We're going to have to make Tommy throw into tight spaces as opposed to giving him wide-open spaces.' He likes to scramble, so we had to make sure, especially in zone coverages, that we find those receivers." —Big Ten defensive coach

The Huskers lost by double digits just once last year, laying an egg at Purdue 55-45. Not coincidentally, it was the one game Armstrong sat out (foot injury). The senior QB has upped his QBR each year: 60.9 in '13, 64.3 in '14 and 73.3 in '15. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW MUCH NEBRASKA RELIES ON ARMSTRONG?** "During pregame warm-ups, I thought Nebraska had the biggest separation between their starting QB and their backups of any team in the conference. You looked at the backups and thought, 'Boy, I wish we were playing those guys.'" —Big Ten defensive coach

Opposing quarterbacks worked the Huskers in 2015 (59.8 defensive QBR, No. 92 in the FBS). And last year's much-maligned secondary (12.9 ypc allowed, No. 89) will be tested again with departures on the D-line. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS D IN '16?** "Big holes to fill up front, but Nebraska doesn't lack for athletes on the line. They've got younger guys with size who can run." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Tommy Armstrong Jr.**	Sr.	6-1	220	●
RB	**Terrell Newby**	Sr.	5-10	200	●
WR	**Brandon Reilly**	Sr.	6-2	200	●
WR	**Jordan Westerkamp**	Sr.	6-0	200	●
WR	**Alonzo Moore**	Sr.	6-2	195	
TE	**Cethan Carter**	Sr.	6-4	240	●
C	**Dylan Utter**	Sr.	6-1	295	●
RG	**Tanner Farmer**	So.	6-4	294	
LG	**Jerald Foster**	So.	6-3	310	
RT	**David Knevel**	Jr.	6-9	315	
LT	**Nick Gates**	So.	6-5	300	●
K	**Drew Brown**	Jr.	5-11	195	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Ross Dzuris**	Sr.	6-3	255	
DT	**Carlos Davis**	RFr.	6-2	295	
DT	**Kevin Maurice**	Sr.	6-3	300	
DE	**Freedom Akinmoladun**	So.	6-4	255	
WLB	**Marcus Newby**	Jr.	6-1	235	●
MLB	**Josh Banderas**	Sr.	6-3	240	●
SLB	**Dedrick Young**	So.	6-1	220	●
CB	**Joshua Kalu**	Jr.	6-1	190	●
CB	**Chris Jones**	Jr.	6-0	185	●
SS	**Aaron Williams**	So.	5-11	185	
FS	**Nate Gerry**	Sr.	6-2	210	●
P	**Sam Foltz**	Sr.	6-2	205	●

12

Armstrong had 12 INTs on passes thrown 10-plus yards, third most among Power 5 QBs.

MICHAEL HICKEY/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9 ● **FPI CHANCE NEBRASKA WINS**

9/3 vs. Fresno State **96%** ● **9/10** vs. Wyoming **96%** ● **9/17** vs. Oregon **64%**
9/24 @ Northwestern **68%** ● **10/1** vs. Illinois **86%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** @ Indiana **75%**
10/22 vs. Purdue **85%** ● **10/29** @ Wisconsin **45%** ● **11/5** @ Ohio State **31%**
11/12 vs. Minnesota **85%** ● **11/19** vs. Maryland **88%** ● **11/25** @ Iowa **53%**

2 Wisconsin

COACH Paul Chryst (2nd season)
10–3 (1–0 in bowl games)

In his 2015 homecoming, Paul Chryst led the Badgers to 10 wins but lost the inside track to a West crown after an early loss to Iowa at Camp Randall. To steer the Badgers back to Indianapolis, he'll bank on (surprise!) a reliable ground game—on both sides of the ball. Wisconsin returns its star ball carrier and the lion's share of its front seven. —M.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (6–2)
BOWL GAME National Funding Holiday Bowl vs. USC, 23-21 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Joel Stave: 2,687 yards
RUSHING **Dare Ogunbowale: 819 yards**
RECEIVING Alex Erickson: 978 yards
TACKLES **T.J. Edwards: 84**
SACKS Joe Schobert: 9½
INTERCEPTIONS Tanner McEvoy: 6

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Corey Clement
Clement returns to Madison after a forgettable year: He played just four games (and had just one 100-yard outing) because of an ankle injury and sports hernia surgery. His fill-ins, senior Dare Ogunbowale and soph Taiwan Deal, were dependable (13 rush TDs combined), but the Badgers failed to put up 2,000 rush yards for the first time since '04. Clement managed to rack up 949 yards and nine TDs as the backup behind Melvin Gordon two years ago, so the Badgers will welcome a return to a more Wisconsin-like ground game this fall.

X-FACTOR LB Vince Biegel
The Badgers regularly field elite linebacking corps, but losing reigning Big Ten LB of the year Joe Schobert, who forced five fumbles (T2 in the FBS) and 19½ TFLs (T11), leaves a playmaking hole. The Badgers will need Biegel, a senior with 15½ sacks over the past two seasons, to step into the role of top playmaker to help avoid a drop-off for the nation's fourth-best run D last year (95.4 ypg).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Senior Bart Houston emerged in Week 8 when he replaced Joel Stave against Illinois and threw for 232 yards and two TDs. His experience may make him better suited to see the Badgers through a tough slate (Michigan, Michigan State and Ohio State from the East), but redshirt frosh Alex Hornibrook looks to be the long-term answer. A Pitt decommit and early enrollee in '15, he has a rocket arm and a strong bond with Chryst, who had recruited him since his junior year at Malvern (Pa.) Prep.

THE PRESSER

Playing most of the season without Clement sapped Wisconsin's rush attack, which gained 150.3 ypg last year, a 50 percent drop from 2014. But an O-line that dealt with experience and depth woes a year ago returns all but one man, including senior C Dan Voltz, who ended 2015 sidelined by a knee injury. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT REVIVING THE RUN?** "The thing that concerns me most with Wisconsin and the way Paul operates is the O-line. Their system works. A year or two from now, I think people will say that he has done a good job of getting those guys to be Wisconsin again." —Big Ten defensive coach

Coordinator Dave Aranda left for LSU, but the legacy of his 3-4 D—and six of last year's starters who made it tick—remains. New DC Justin Wilcox (USC) inherits a unit that ranks No. 1 in the FBS since '13 in ypg (289.4, one of three teams below 300) and No. 2 in ppg (17.0). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE TRANSITION TO WILCOX?** "Aranda's stuff, they didn't give you a bunch of crazy, different looks. They lined up and played and had some good pressures off their base stuff. Justin's the same." —Big Ten offensive coach

Five of Wisconsin's top six tacklers in '15 were linebackers. Four of them (256 tackles, 30½ TFLs combined) are back. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D'S CALLING CARD FOR '16?** "They haven't had a dominant guy up front, maybe going back to J.J. Watt. But they've got such good linebackers, they make up for it. Biegel stands out. He's the next name everyone is going to know." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Bart Houston**	Sr.	6-4	228	
RB	**Corey Clement**	Sr.	5-11	217	●
TE	**Troy Fumagalli**	Jr.	6-6	251	
WR	**Robert Wheelwright**	Sr.	6-3	202	●
WR	**Jazz Peavy**	Jr.	6-0	182	
TE	**Eric Steffes**	Sr.	6-5	259	
C	**Dan Voltz**	Sr.	6-3	301	●
RG	**Beau Benzschawel**	So.	6-6	309	●
LG	**Michael Deiter**	So.	6-6	318	●
RT	**Jacob Maxwell**	So.	6-6	319	●
LT	**Ryan Ramczyk**	Jr.	6-6	308	
K	**Rafael Gaglianone**	Jr.	5-11	230	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Conor Sheehy**	Jr.	6-4	290	●
NT	**Olive Sagapolu**	So.	6-2	332	
DE	**Chikwe Obasih**	Jr.	6-3	268	●
OLB	**Vince Biegel**	Sr.	6-4	244	●
ILB	**T.J. Edwards**	So.	6-1	238	●
ILB	**Jack Cichy**	Jr.	6-2	220	●
OLB	**T.J. Watt**	Jr.	6-5	247	
CB	**Derrick Tindal**	Jr.	5-11	174	
CB	**Sojourn Shelton**	Sr.	5-9	173	●
SS	**D'Cota Dixon**	Jr.	5-10	206	
FS	**Leo Musso**	Sr.	5-10	186	
P	**Anthony Lotti**	Fr.	6-1	190	

6.6

Since 2013, Clement's 6.6 ypc ranks eighth among Power 5 backs (minimum 250 carries).

MIKE MCGINNIS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.5 ● FPI CHANCE WISCONSIN WINS

9/3 vs. LSU (Green Bay, Wis.) **15%** ● **9/10** vs. Akron **96%** ● **9/17** vs. Georgia State **95%**
9/24 @ Michigan State **46%** ● **10/1** @ Michigan **27%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** vs. Ohio State **48%**
10/22 @ Iowa **50%** ● **10/29** vs. Nebraska **55%** ● **11/5** @ Northwestern **65%** ● **11/12** vs. Illinois **85%**
11/19 @ Purdue **72%** ● **11/26** vs. Minnesota **82%**

3 Iowa

COACH Kirk Ferentz (18th season)
127–87 (6–7 in bowl games)

The Hawkeyes rolled to the first 12-win season in school history last year, and though their campaign ended in two straight losses, they should vie for Big Ten West top billing again. The bulk of last year's firepower returns to Iowa City, including the Hawkeyes' most critical playmakers: steady-handed QB C.J. Beathard and Thorpe Award winner DB Desmond King. —M.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12–2 (8–0)
BOWL GAME Rose Bowl Game Presented by Northwestern Mutual vs. Stanford, 45-16 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **C.J. Beathard: 2,809 yards**
RUSHING Jordan Canzeri: 984 yards
RECEIVING **Matt VandeBerg: 703 yards**
TACKLES **Josey Jewell: 126**
SACKS Nate Meier: 7
INTERCEPTIONS **Desmond King: 8**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB C.J. Beathard
Beathard's consistency (70.3 QBR last year, No. 31 in the FBS) and ability to stay out of trouble (5 INTs, T11) begat a consistent, mostly trouble-free Iowa: The Hawkeyes didn't trail in the fourth quarter until their 13th game. And though the senior QB's knack for making plays with his legs (13 runs of 10-plus yards) confounded defenders, it also wore him down—Beathard played through hip and groin injuries for almost the entire year. Keeping him on the field is priority No. 1 (and 2, 3, 4 ...) because Iowa is a middle-of-the-pack Big Ten West squad without Beathard. With him? It's among the favorites to repeat.

X-FACTOR WR Matt VandeBerg
The South Dakota product is not the fastest or strongest Big Ten wide receiver—just 50.8 percent of his catches went for a first down or TD last year (league average: 61.1). But he is a reliable target for Beathard, especially over the middle, with a team-high 65 grabs in 2015. Still, the Hawkeyes mustered just 20 catches of 25-plus yards last year (T96 in the FBS), so a downfield threat still eludes Iowa.

POSITION BATTLE Outside linebacker
The Hawkeyes' stout linebackers helped bottle up big runs last year (only 11 rushes of 20-plus yards allowed, T8 in the Power 5). Iowa's second-leading tackler, weakside LB Cole Fisher, departs, but juniors Ben Niemann and Bo Bower return to duke it out at strong-side. Niemann started all 14 games last year, but Bower contributed (15 tackles) and also brings starting experience (13 games in '14).

THE PRESSER

The Hawkeyes broke in new starting offensive tackles last year and still opened holes for three different backs to top 195 yards in a game. This year Iowa must again replace its two best O-linemen (C Austin Blythe, RG Jordan Walsh). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR THE RUN GAME IN 2016?** "They've always had great offensive lines. They do a great job up front with their schemes. The running backs were good. But the guy who makes the difference is Beathard because of his ability to scramble." —Big Ten defensive coach

Senior TE George Kittle broke out with six TDs last year, tied for the most at his position in the Kirk Ferentz era. And it was the third straight season a tight end scored at least seven TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT IOWA'S CONTINUED SUCCESS AT TIGHT END?** "Everything they do is fundamentally sound. And once you've established that those guys are instrumental in the offense ... it makes recruiting easy." —Big Ten defensive coach

Three members of Iowa's secondary (6.2 ypa allowed in '15, No. 20 in the FBS) return, including the defense's most dangerous weapon in King. The Big Ten's reigning DB of the year led the Hawkeyes in interceptions (eight, matching a school record)—even as opposing QBs were loath to throw to his side of the field. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT MADE KING A BALL HAWK?** "He's really a good man-to-man player. And when they play their zones, he's got help over the top." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**C.J. Beathard**	Sr.	6-2	215	●
RB	**LeShun Daniels Jr.**	Sr.	6-0	225	
WR	**Jay Scheel**	So.	6-1	195	
WR	**Matt VandeBerg**	Sr.	6-1	190	●
WR	**Jerminic Smith**	So.	6-1	185	
TE	**George Kittle**	Sr.	6-4	246	
C	**Sean Welsh**	Jr.	6-3	288	●
RG	**James Daniels**	So.	6-4	295	
LG	**Boone Myers**	Jr.	6-5	305	●
RT	**Ike Boettger**	Jr.	6-6	307	
LT	**Cole Croston**	Sr.	6-5	307	●
K	**Miguel Recinos**	So.	6-1	190	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Parker Hesse**	So.	6-3	250	●
DT	**Nathan Bazata**	Jr.	6-2	285	●
DT	**Jaleel Johnson**	Sr.	6-4	310	●
DE	**Matt Nelson**	So.	6-8	275	
WLB	**Aaron Mends**	So.	6-0	220	
MLB	**Josey Jewell**	Jr.	6-2	235	●
OLB	**Ben Niemann**	Jr.	6-3	230	●
CB	**Desmond King**	Sr.	5-11	203	●
CB	**Greg Mabin**	Sr.	5-11	205	●
SS	**Miles Taylor**	Jr.	6-0	195	●
FS	**Brandon Snyder**	So.	6-1	210	
P	**Colten Rastetter**	RFr.	6-2	205	

19 Iowa's D, headlined by King, collected 19 INTs in '15, tied for the fourth most in the Power 5.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.7 ● FPI CHANCE IOWA WINS

9/3 vs. Miami (Ohio) **95%** ● **9/10** vs. Iowa State **80%** ● **9/17** vs. North Dakota State **82%**
9/24 @ Rutgers **67%** ● **10/1** vs. Northwestern **72%** ● **10/8** @ Minnesota **64%**
10/15 @ Purdue **65%** ● **10/22** vs. Wisconsin **50%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ Penn State **41%**
11/12 vs. Michigan **35%** ● **11/19** @ Illinois **69%** ● **11/25** vs. Nebraska **47%**

ZACH BOLINGER/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

4 Northwestern

COACH Pat Fitzgerald (11th season)
70–56 (1–5 in bowl games)

After two straight five-win seasons, Northwestern won 10 games in '15—just the fourth such campaign in program history. The Wildcats welcome back enough key pieces (QB Clayton Thorson, LB Anthony Walker) to spur talk of another double-digit run ... but it won't come easy. A tricky home date with Duke and cross-divisional road trips to Columbus and East Lansing loom. —M.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Outback Bowl vs. Tennessee, 45-6 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Clayton Thorson: 1,522 yards**
RUSHING **Justin Jackson: 1,418 yards**
RECEIVING Dan Vitale: 355 yards
TACKLES **Anthony Walker: 122**
SACKS Deonte Gibson: 9
INTERCEPTIONS **Matthew Harris: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Justin Jackson
The junior has run for 2,605 yards in two years in Evanston, just 94 fewer than Florida State's Heisman hopeful RB Dalvin Cook and more than Shock Linwood (Baylor), Wayne Gallman (Clemson) and Jalen Hurd (Tennessee) in that same time. Jackson won't dazzle—he averaged more than 6 yards per carry in just one outing last year and ran for 10-plus yards only 30 times (No. 43 among FBS backs)—but he's a workhorse. His 312 rushes (third most in the country) accounted for more than half of Northwestern's ground game.

X-FACTOR WR Solomon Vault
The former RB is the first player in program history to return three kicks for TDs in a career and offers the Wildcats burst that is lacking elsewhere. Northwestern's 22 catches of 20-plus yards in '15 was No. 123 in the FBS, and the Cats were one of three Power 5 teams without a receiver hitting the 400-yard mark. They'll look to Vault's explosiveness to help stretch the field on offense this fall.

POSITION BATTLE Cornerback
Northwestern loses four-year starter Nick VanHoose, but the Cats are so flush with potential subs that they moved two corners elsewhere—junior Marcus McShepard to receiver and sophomore Parrker Westphal to safety. Veteran CB Matthew Harris (a senior with 27 career starts) will man one side, and Keith Watkins II and Montre Hartage will vie to line up opposite him. Opposing QBs will avoid Harris (4 INTs, 13 passes broken up in '15), so the Watkins-Hartage competition is pivotal.

THE PRESSER

Thorson struggled late in 2015, failing to reach 100 pass yards in four of his final five games. And after posting at least a serviceable 50.1 QBR in the first six games, he dropped to 39.2 in the last seven. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER YOU EXPECT A JUMP FROM THORSON IN '16?** "It depends on how they approach it. He's got a good set of skills, but we haven't seen all that much yet. The more they ask of him, the more problems could arise." —Big Ten defensive coach

Northwestern was rock solid defensively for most of 2015, allowing 4.5 ypp, the seventh-best rate in the country. But in losses to Michigan, Iowa and Tennessee, the Wildcats were outscored 123-16. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THEY HAVE A CEILING?** "Other than two to three guys, they didn't light anybody on fire. They play solid D. But if you can neutralize their best players—and it's not everybody out there—their efficiency drops." —Big Ten offensive coach

Even with three terrible outings, the Wildcats were No. 2, behind Alabama, in defensive QBR (18.4) in 2015. Much of that success springs from Walker, a junior, who had 20½ TFLs, four sacks and four pass breakups from the middle linebacker spot last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW HE IMPACTS THE GAME?** "He's not just an inside 'backer. They can move him around. He's just so disruptive. You try to get up to the second level to block him, and he's got the toughness to run you over or the speed to go around you." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Clayton Thorson**	So.	6-4	220	●
RB	**Justin Jackson**	Jr.	5-11	190	●
WR	**Austin Carr**	Sr.	6-1	195	
WR	**Solomon Vault**	Jr.	5-10	190	
WR	**Flynn Nagel**	So.	5-11	190	
TE	**Garrett Dickerson**	Jr.	6-3	245	
C	**Brad North**	Jr.	6-2	290	
RG	**Shane Mertz**	Sr.	6-8	310	●
LG	**Ian Park**	Sr.	6-4	305	●
RT	**Eric Olson**	Sr.	6-6	295	●
LT	**Blake Hance**	So.	6-5	300	●
K	**Jack Mitchell**	Sr.	6-3	210	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Ifeadi Odenigbo**	Sr.	6-3	250	
DT	**Tyler Lancaster**	Jr.	6-3	300	●
DT	**C.J. Robbins**	Sr.	6-5	300	●
DE	**Joe Gaziano**	RFr.	6-4	255	
WLB	**Jaylen Prater**	Sr.	6-0	230	●
MLB	**Anthony Walker**	Jr.	6-1	235	●
SLB	**Nate Hall**	So.	6-2	230	
CB	**Keith Watkins II**	Jr.	5-11	180	
CB	**Matthew Harris**	Sr.	5-11	180	●
SS	**Godwin Igwebuike**	Jr.	6-0	200	●
FS	**Kyle Queiro**	Jr.	6-3	200	
P	**Hunter Niswander**	Jr.	6-5	235	●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.7 ● FPI CHANCE NORTHWESTERN WINS

9/3 vs. Western Michigan **58%** ● **9/10** vs. Illinois State **85%** ● **9/17** vs. Duke **62%**
9/24 vs. Nebraska **33%** ● **10/1** @ Iowa **28%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** @ Michigan State **28%**
10/22 vs. Indiana **64%** ● **10/29** @ Ohio State **14%** ● **11/5** vs. Wisconsin **35%**
11/12 @ Purdue **50%** ● **11/19** @ Minnesota **48%** ● **11/26** vs. Illinois **69%**

Jackson is the fifth Wildcat in program history to record back-to-back 1,000-yard rushing seasons.

MARGARET BOWLES/AP IMAGES

5 Minnesota

COACH Tracy Claeys (2nd season)
2-4 (1-0 in bowl games)

Once again, the Gophers find themselves in a hole. After logging two straight eight-win campaigns for the first time in more than a decade, Minnesota regressed to 6-7 in a year overshadowed by the resignation of coach Jerry Kill. Longtime DC Tracy Claeys got the nod to take over, but he must replace the core of Minnesota's D while overseeing a new-look offensive system. —M.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6-7 (2-6)
BOWL GAME Quick Lane Bowl
vs. Central Michigan, 21-14 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Mitch Leidner: 2,701 yards**
RUSHING **Shannon Brooks: 709 yards**
RECEIVING KJ Maye: 773 yards
TACKLES Antonio Johnson: 102
SACKS De'Vondre Campbell: 4
INTERCEPTIONS Briean Boddy-Calhoun: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Mitch Leidner
If quarterbacks were graded solely on toughness, Leidner would be a first-team All-American. He has played through a host of injuries (and this offseason underwent foot surgery) en route to 25 straight starts over the past two years. Unfortunately for the Gophers, his other 2015 marks were decidedly less stellar: a 64.3 QBR (No. 52 in the FBS), 59.5 completion percentage (No. 69) and 14-11 TD-INT ratio (No. 98). Leidner also won't have his top target, KJ Maye, this fall, so he'll shoulder even more of the load to improve Minnesota's 22.5 ppg from last year (No. 106).

X-FACTOR RB Shannon Brooks
He threw a 42-yard TD pass at Iowa. He ran for 174 yards vs. Illinois. He caught 17 passes on the season. And he did it as a true freshman. Look out for Brooks again this year, even as he splits time with fellow sophomore Rodney Smith. Brooks offers the Gophers, who plodded along at a 5.3-ypp clip last year (No. 90 in the FBS), a much-needed big-play option. The dynamic back ranked fourth among Big Ten rushers in ypc last year (6.0).

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
Cody Poock and Jack Lynn return as entrenched veterans (18 combined starts in '15), but the Gophers must fill the outside spot vacated by third-leading tackler De'Vondre Campbell. They have ample options—linebacker is one of Minnesota's deepest units—with the top candidates being junior Jonathan Celestin and senior Nick Rallis, who combined for 61 tackles and 7 TFLs last year.

THE PRESSER

If Leidner is iffy in the air, he can still be a force on the ground. He ran for six TDs last year and converted 55.0 percent of his third-down rushes (No. 15 among FBS QBs). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW HIS VERSATILITY AFFECTS THE D?** "The main thing is, he's big, so if you blitz, you've really got to put something on it to get him down. We've thought of him in the past as a good enough runner. Not as dynamic as some of the other guys in the league, but he's a threat to extend the play, get out of the pocket and run or throw." —Big Ten defensive coach

The Gophers bring former UL Lafayette OC Jay Johnson into the fold, who in turn brings a new offensive attack. Johnson favors the pistol formation and misdirection—a system better suited for potential backup QBs Demry Croft and Seth Green than incumbent Leidner. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THESE CHANGES FIT WITH THE PERSONNEL?** "That team doesn't look to be built for speed. I mean, their punter, their kicker, their holder are bigger than half the guys on a lot of teams. Everybody was big." —Big Ten defensive coach

Senior DB Jalen Myrick looks ready to step in as Minnesota's next lockdown corner (3 INTs last year), but the secondary is down three starters. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE DBs?** "Now that those players are gone, I think it's going to be a challenge. Especially at corner, I'll be surprised if the next group is quite as talented." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Mitch Leidner**	Sr.	6-4	237	●
RB	**Shannon Brooks**	So.	6-0	206	●
HB	**Brandon Lingen**	Jr.	6-5	247	●
WR	**Eric Carter**	Jr.	5-11	189	
WR	**Drew Wolitarsky**	Sr.	6-3	218	●
TE	**Nate Wozniak**	Jr.	6-10	271	●
C	**Tyler Moore**	So.	6-4	306	●
RG	**Vincent Calhoun**	Jr.	6-4	335	
LG	**Connor Mayes**	Jr.	6-5	328	
RT	**Jonah Pirsig**	Sr.	6-9	316	●
LT	**Garrison Wright**	Jr.	6-4	318	
K	**Ryan Santoso**	Jr.	6-6	250	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Gaelin Elmore**	Jr.	6-6	266	
DT	**Andrew Stelter**	Jr.	6-4	295	●
DT	**Steven Richardson**	Jr.	6-0	291	●
DE	**Hendrick Ekpe**	Sr.	6-5	243	●
OLB	**Jonathan Celestin**	Jr.	6-1	224	
MLB	**Cody Poock**	Jr.	6-2	230	●
OLB	**Jack Lynn**	Sr.	6-3	238	●
CB	**KiAnte Hardin**	So.	5-10	170	
CB	**Jalen Myrick**	Sr.	5-10	205	
S	**Damarius Travis**	Sr.	6-2	208	
S	**Adekunle Ayinde**	Jr.	6-0	203	●
P	**Ryan Santoso**	Jr.	6-6	250	

23

Leidner's 23 career rushing TDs ranks second in program history for a quarterback.

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0 ● **FPI CHANCE MINNESOTA WINS**

9/1 vs. Oregon State **66%** ● **9/10** vs. Indiana State **94%** ● **9/17** BYE
9/24 vs. Colorado State **84%** ● **10/1** @ Penn State **19%** ● **10/8** vs. Iowa **36%**
10/15 @ Maryland **45%** ● **10/22** vs. Rutgers **65%** ● **10/29** @ Illinois **46%** ● **11/5** vs. Purdue **60%**
11/12 @ Nebraska **15%** ● **11/19** vs. Northwestern **52%** ● **11/26** @ Wisconsin **18%**

RICK OSENTOSKI/USA TODAY SPORTS

6 Purdue

COACH Darrell Hazell (4th season)
6-30 (0-0 in bowl games)

Two Big Ten wins in three years does not a solid foundation make. And close calls at Michigan State and Northwestern are nice but don't cut it, so Darrell Hazell replaced both coordinators in a bid to hit reset for 2016. Purdue has invested heavily in young talent, especially on defense, but still looks like a conference lightweight—even in the friendlier Big Ten West. —M.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2-10 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **David Blough: 1,574 yards**
RUSHING **Markell Jones: 875 yards**
RECEIVING **DeAngelo Yancey: 700 yards**
TACKLES **Leroy Clark: 88**
SACKS **Evan Panfil: 4**
INTERCEPTIONS Anthony Brown: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB David Blough
Blough is the only man left from Hazell's three-man quarterback shuffle. Danny Etling transferred to LSU a year ago; Austin Appleby left for Florida after the 2015 season; and while redshirt freshman Elijah Sindelar remains in the mix, Purdue will likely look to sophomore Blough to cultivate seeds of success from last year's performances against Bowling Green, Nebraska and Northwestern. He posted season highs in QBR in those contests (76.7, 86.8 and 72.2, respectively)—a positive sign with quarterback play still a major bugaboo in the Hazell era.

X-FACTOR S Leroy Clark
Clark is a playmaker, plain and simple. He led the Boilermakers in tackles (88). He led them in pass breakups (9). He *didn't* lead in INTs (2) but did in interception return yards (66). The elite Miami native is a leader at safety, perhaps Purdue's best unit, and is one of maybe two players on the roster who could start at any Big Ten program. When your team is as lackluster as the one out of West Lafayette has been, that kind of juice is welcome.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
Purdue's goal for the trenches in 2016: Field a lineup. Woes up front last year—lack of size, minimal push—resulted in 30 sacks (T84 in the FBS) and 131.3 rush ypg (No. 108). The Boilermakers lost their two best blockers from '15, and though senior OGs Jordan Roos and Jason King return, and Martesse Patterson and Cameron Cermin look likely for tackle, the hole at center looks more like an abyss.

THE PRESSER

After one season leading the tight ends, Terry Malone takes over as OC with work to do: QBs have logged a 42.5 QBR in the Hazell era (No. 102 in the FBS). That makes finding the rare Purdue weapon—like senior WR DeAngelo Yancey, whose 14.6 ypc was top 10 in the Big Ten—a challenge. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RECHARGING PURDUE'S ATTACK?** "You see it in bits and pieces. I thought the receivers were quality. They had a good combination of size and downfield speed. And I think Terry will help them find out who they are. If they go forward, in any direction, with a better identity on offense, I think it would be a real positive." —Big Ten defensive coach

The Purdue D is a mixed bag. It allowed 459.0 ypg last season (No. 110 in the FBS) but loses just one starter on the front seven in '16. Among those returning is senior DT Jake Replogle, a particularly bright spot with 14 TFLs logged in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D-LINE'S STRENGTH?** "The defensive-line play in the Big Ten is better than people think. Everybody has a solid group. Purdue is in that same category. But they're lacking at places in the back end, which makes it more difficult on the guys up front." —Big Ten defensive coach

The Boilermakers' seven Big Ten losses were by an average of 18 points. They just don't keep it close consistently, even against fellow cellar dwellers. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PURDUE'S STRIDES?** "Where can you see them going? Maybe up one spot? There's just not a lot of room yet for that program to make a leap." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**David Blough**	So.	6-1	202	●
RB	**Markell Jones**	So.	5-11	207	●
WR	**Cameron Posey**	Sr.	6-1	192	●
WR	**DeAngelo Yancey**	Sr.	6-2	216	●
WR	**Domonique Young**	Sr.	6-3	210	●
TE	**Cole Herdman**	So.	6-4	238	
C	**Kirk Barron**	So.	6-2	310	
RG	**Jordan Roos**	Sr.	6-4	301	●
LG	**Jason King**	Sr.	6-4	310	●
RT	**Cameron Cermin**	Sr.	6-5	310	●
LT	**Martesse Patterson**	So.	6-3	340	
K	**J.D. Dellinger**	Fr.	6-2	175	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Evan Panfil**	Sr.	6-5	268	●
DT	**Ra'Zahn Howard**	Sr.	6-3	325	
DT	**Jake Replogle**	Sr.	6-5	294	●
DE	**Gelen Robinson**	Jr.	6-1	265	●
WLB	**Danny Ezechukwu**	Jr.	6-2	251	●
MLB	**Ja'Whaun Bentley**	Jr.	6-2	250	●
SLB	**Andy James Garcia**	Sr.	6-0	228	●
CB	**Da'Wan Hunte**	Jr.	5-9	188	
CB	**Tim Cason**	So.	5-11	195	
SS	**Leroy Clark**	Sr.	5-10	197	●
FS	**Robert Gregory**	Sr.	6-1	231	●
P	**Joe Schopper**	So.	6-0	193	●

875

Jones' 875 rush yards in 2015 was the most by a true freshman in program history.

SANDRA DUKES/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.6 ● **FPI CHANCE PURDUE WINS**

9/3 vs. Eastern Kentucky **94%** ● **9/10** vs. Cincinnati **59%** ● **9/17** BYE
9/24 vs. Nevada **81%** ● **10/1** @ Maryland **41%** ● **10/8** @ Illinois **46%**
10/15 vs. Iowa **35%** ● **10/22** @ Nebraska **15%** ● **10/29** vs. Penn State **33%** ● **11/5** @ Minnesota **40%**
11/12 vs. Northwestern **50%** ● **11/19** vs. Wisconsin **29%** ● **11/26** @ Indiana **41%**

7 Illinois

COACH Lovie Smith (1st season)

Illinois hired NFL mainstay Lovie Smith on March 7 and gave him $4 million to build a staff—$1.6 million more than allotted to predecessor Bill Cubit. Smith quickly hired Louisville OC Garrick McGee and San Francisco 49ers LB coach Hardy Nickerson to run the D. In a nod to stability, Smith kept four staffers and hired a Butkus (Luke) to instill some trademark toughness. —M.S.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 (2-6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Wes Lunt: 2,761 yards**
RUSHING **Ke'Shawn Vaughn: 723 yards**
RECEIVING Geronimo Allison: 882 yards
TACKLES Clayton Fejedelem: 140
SACKS **Dawuane Smoot: 8**
INTERCEPTIONS **Taylor Barton: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Wes Lunt

The Illinois-bred signal-caller and former Oklahoma State starter is back for a third season under center, after an up-and-down two years in Champaign. Lunt has a strong arm and finds his man, throwing off target on just 10.1 percent of his passes last year, a respectable 19th among Power 5 QBs. If only his teammates reciprocated. Illini receivers dropped 6.4 percent of their targets, No. 55 in the Power 5. This fall he'll team with his new OC/QB coach, McGee, who brings a pass-heavy "multiple pro-style" attack, in a bid to finally maximize his passing acumen.

X-FACTOR RB Ke'Shawn Vaughn

After Josh Ferguson, Illinois' top rusher from '14, was sidelined midyear by a shoulder injury, Vaughn emerged as a promising—and durable—backfield threat in 2015. With Ferguson out for the better part of four games, Vaughn took 71 of the Illini's 96 handoffs. At 5-foot-10, 205 pounds, he has good size and should push for 1,000 yards this fall. That's a level of production Illinois has lacked since 2010.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive end

Before the coaching shuffle, Illinois added Auburn graduate transfer Gimel President to the roster. President started nine games for the Tigers in 2014 before getting demoted to a reserve role last season, so look for the transplant to compete with senior D-linemen Dawuane Smoot and Carroll Phillips to provide a pass-rush boost. Smoot rang up eight sacks last year, but the rest of the Illini combined for only 11.

THE PRESSER

After completing less than 50 percent of his passes just once in his first seven games in '15, Lunt managed to do so in three of his final five outings. Illinois hopes that's an aberration for the QB, who completed over 60 percent of his passes in 2012 (as a Cowboy) and 2014. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU EXPECT FROM LUNT AS A SENIOR?** "He throws on time and goes to the open guys. I wouldn't say he's got an overly strong arm, but I thought he was accurate. When he has to make throws, he makes throws." —Big Ten defensive coach

The Illini lose last year's top receiver, Geronimo Allison, but regain a previous team leader in Mike Dudek. After setting Illinois' single-season freshman records for receiving yards (1,038) and receptions (76) and tying the TD mark (six) in 2014, Dudek sat out all of last year with an ACL tear. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE ILLINI'S MOVING PIECES AT WR?** "They're solid and attack the ball. You can have great receivers, average or below average, but if you have a good quarterback who can put the ball on somebody's body, then you have a chance." —Big Ten defensive coach

The D ranked top 30 in defensive QBR (34.6), ypg (350.8) and ypp (4.9)—and loses only one full-time starter along the front. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THE LINE DISRUPTS OPPONENTS?** "That has been the strength of their D. They are physical at end and have good pass rushers. I thought [Smoot and Phillips] were really disruptive, but I think it's going to take them time. It's been such a transition." —Big Ten offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Wes Lunt**	Sr.	6-5	225	●
RB	**Ke'Shawn Vaughn**	So.	5-10	205	
WR	**Malik Turner**	Jr.	6-3	205	●
WR	**Dionte Taylor**	Sr.	6-0	190	●
WR	**Desmond Cain**	So.	5-11	185	●
TE	**Tyler White**	Sr.	6-5	255	
C	**Joe Spencer**	Sr.	6-4	300	●
RG	**Nick Allegretti**	So.	6-4	305	
LG	**Gabe Megginson**	RFr.	6-5	300	
RT	**Austin Schmidt**	Sr.	6-6	300	●
LT	**Christian DiLauro**	Jr.	6-5	300	●
K	**David Reisner**	Sr.	6-0	195	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Carroll Phillips**	Sr.	6-3	240	
NT	**Rob Bain**	Sr.	6-3	305	●
DT	**Jarrod Clements**	Sr.	6-3	290	●
DE	**Dawuane Smoot**	Sr.	6-3	265	●
WLB	**Tre Watson**	So.	6-2	240	
MLB	**Hardy Nickerson**	Sr.	6-0	230	
SLB	**James Crawford**	Jr.	6-2	220	
CB	**Darius Mosely**	Sr.	5-11	190	
CB	**Jaylen Dunlap**	Jr.	6-1	190	
SS	**Taylor Barton**	Sr.	6-1	215	●
FS	**Caleb Day**	Sr.	6-1	205	
P	**Ryan Frain**	Sr.	6-2	220	●

200

In 2014, Dudek posted the fourth 200-receiving-yard game in Illinois history.

BRADLEY LEEB/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

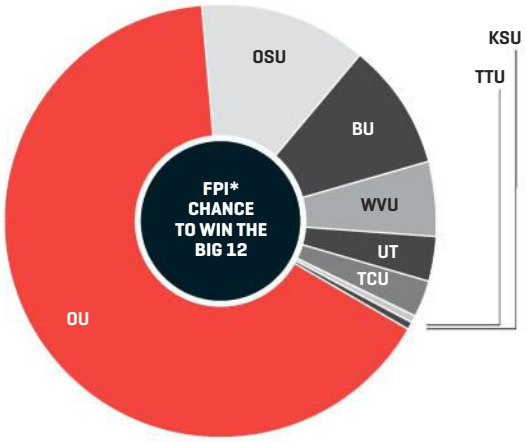
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4 ● **FPI CHANCE ILLINOIS WINS**

9/3 vs. Murray State **97%** ● **9/10** vs. North Carolina **19%** ● **9/17** vs. Western Michigan **46%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** @ Nebraska **15%** ● **10/8** vs. Purdue **54%** ● **10/15** @ Rutgers **41%**
10/22 @ Michigan **7%** ● **10/29** vs. Minnesota **54%** ● **11/5** vs. Michigan State **29%**
11/12 @ Wisconsin **15%** ● **11/19** vs. Iowa **32%** ● **11/26** @ Northwestern **31%**

BIG 12

Big 12 outlook

	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN CONFERENCE
OKLAHOMA	3	65.4%
OKLAHOMA STATE	10	13.0%
BAYLOR	16	9.9%
WEST VIRGINIA	24	5.7%
TEXAS	29	3.0%
TCU	33	2.6%
TEXAS TECH	45	0.4%
KANSAS STATE	57	0.1%
IOWA STATE	71	0%
KANSAS	107	0%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

AVERAGE FPI RANK
39.5

PROJECTED CHAMPION
65%
OKLAHOMA

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB	**Baker Mayfield**	Sr.	Oklahoma

ALL-BIG 12

QB	**Baker Mayfield**	Sr.	Oklahoma
RB	**Samaje Perine**	Jr.	Oklahoma
RB	**Mike Warren**	So.	Iowa State
WR	**James Washington**	Jr.	Oklahoma State
WR	**KD Cannon**	Jr.	Baylor
TE	**Mark Andrews**	So.	Oklahoma
OL	**Kyle Fuller**	Sr.	Baylor
OL	**Adam Pankey**	Sr.	West Virginia
OL	**Patrick Vahe**	So.	Texas
OL	**Connor Williams**	So.	Texas
OL	**Orlando Brown**	So.	Oklahoma

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

LB	**Malik Jefferson**	So.	Texas

ALL-BIG 12

DL	**Charles Walker**	Jr.	Oklahoma
DL	**Noble Nwachukwu**	Sr.	West Virginia
DL	**Demond Tucker**	Sr.	Iowa State
DL	**Will Geary**	Jr.	Kansas State
LB	**Malik Jefferson**	So.	Texas
LB	**Taylor Young**	Jr.	Baylor
DB	**Denzel Johnson**	Sr.	TCU
CB	**Jordan Thomas**	Jr.	Oklahoma
CB	**Duke Shelley**	So.	Kansas State
S	**Jordan Sterns**	Sr.	Oklahoma State
S	**Steven Parker**	Jr.	Oklahoma

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Matthew McCrane**	Jr.	Kansas State
P	**Austin Seibert**	So.	Oklahoma
RS	**KaVontae Turpin**	So.	TCU

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER
- **9/17** Pittsburgh @ Oklahoma St. (80*)
- **9/17** Ohio State @ Oklahoma (88)
- **9/24** Oklahoma St. @ Baylor (86)

OCTOBER
- **10/1** Oklahoma @ TCU (86)
- **10/8** Texas vs. Oklahoma (86)
- **10/29** West Virginia @ Oklahoma St. (82)

NOVEMBER
- **11/12** Baylor @ Oklahoma (88)
- **11/19** Oklahoma @ West Virginia (91)
- **11/26** Baylor vs. Texas Tech (73)

*Matchup quality (0-100 scale) rates games based on team strength (FPI) and how close the contest is expected to be.

MANNY FLORES/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

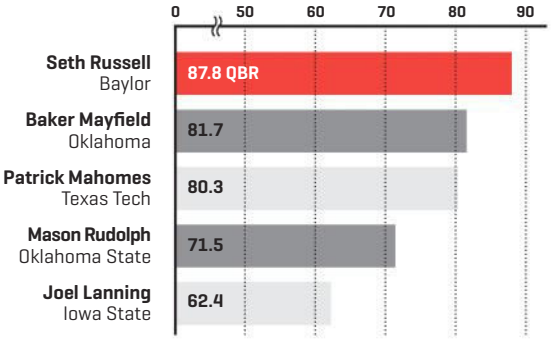
STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

Texas (15th) plays the league's toughest slate. Baylor gets the weakest at 60.

36 AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

Baylor quarterbacks often can be found on top of lists. But Mayfield and Mahomes also are among the nation's best.



KD Cannon

Baylor's star wideout averaged 17.6 yards per catch on 108 receptions in his first two seasons in Waco.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Oklahoma

COACH Bob Stoops (18th season)
179–46 (8–9 in bowl games)

Bob Stoops followed up one of the most disappointing seasons of his career (8-5 in 2014) to capture the Big 12 championship and advance to the College Football Playoff. With 14 starters returning, including brash quarterback Baker Mayfield, the Sooners have the lofty aim of not just getting back to the playoff but winning the whole shootin' match in 2016. —Jake Trotter

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11–2 (8–1)
BOWL GAME Capital One Orange Bowl vs. Clemson (CFP semifinal), 37-17 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Baker Mayfield: 3,700 yards**
RUSHING **Samaje Perine: 1,349 yards**
RECEIVING Sterling Shepard: 1,288 yards
TACKLES Dominique Alexander: 103
SACKS Eric Striker: 7½
INTERCEPTIONS Zack Sanchez: 7

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Baker Mayfield
Mayfield's fearless attitude and fiery approach instantly rubbed off on the Sooners, who averaged 47.6 ppg after an Oct. 10 loss to Texas. The former walk-on had an 81.7 QBR and delivered in clutch moments, most notably in an overtime comeback at Tennessee and a shootout win at Baylor, which ultimately catapulted OU to its first outright Big 12 title in five years. After finishing fourth in the Heisman voting, Mayfield should start this season on the short list of front-runners.

X-FACTOR WR Geno Lewis
Four years ago, Justin Brown transferred in from Penn State to boost Oklahoma's receiving corps. Now the Sooners hope another former Nittany Lion can do the same. Lewis needs to regain his form; he caught 55 passes in 2014, then just 17 last season. But on a unit that graduated All-American Sterling Shepard (86 catches, 1,288 yards, 11 TDs) and returns just one pass catcher with more than 28 receptions (Dede Westbrook, 46), any newcomer is good news.

POSITION BATTLE Cornerback
Dakota Austin and P.J. Mbanasor are both vying to replace All-Big 12 cornerback Zack Sanchez, who declared early for the NFL draft. The Sooners return the rest of a secondary that helped them lead the Big 12 in pass efficiency defense and tie for fifth nationally with 40 sacks. If either Austin or Mbanasor can play at the level of standout juniors Steven Parker and Jordan Thomas, OU will feature one of the nation's most dangerous defensive backfields.

THE PRESSER

Last season Mayfield led the country in passing efficiency late in games, completing a sizzling 71.2 percent of his passes in the second half and overtime. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MAYFIELD?** "The mentality that he brings rallies up the whole team. Sometimes he doesn't do it the way you'd draw it up, but he gets the job done. He's got good enough skills to make people miss when he runs, and he throws the ball accurately. A dangerous quarterback."
—Big 12 offensive coach

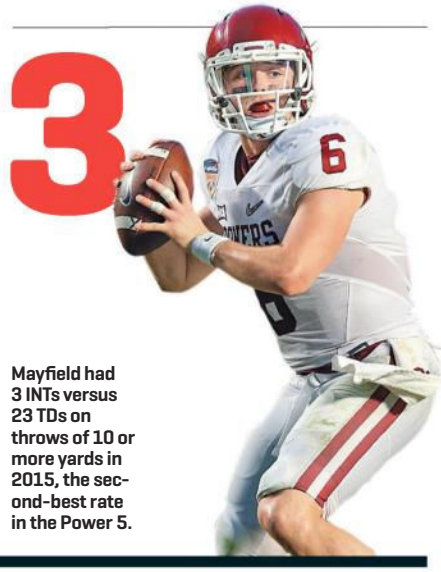
Samaje Perine and Joe Mixon are one of only six returning Power 5 running back tandems that rushed for at least 2,000 yards last season. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE TWO RUNNING BACKS?** "I think Mixon is still behind Perine in production and physicality. When OU needed something, it was Perine who was getting the ball. But if Mixon can close the gap between the two, watch out."
—Big 12 defensive coach

The Sooners had the only defense in the Big 12 that finished with more interceptions (20) than TD passes allowed (19). Sanchez, however, had seven of those picks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT OKLAHOMA'S SECONDARY?** "I know they lost a big-name guy [Sanchez], but I think their defensive back unit will still be very strong again. They have one terrific corner [Thomas] coming back, and they do a great job developing defensive backs. The scheme they run, it helps that, because they're very aggressive; they'll sit on routes." —Big 12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Baker Mayfield**	Sr.	6-1	212	●
RB	**Samaje Perine**	Jr.	5-10	234	●
WR	**Geno Lewis**	Sr.	6-1	201	
WR	**A.D. Miller**	So.	6-3	189	
WR	**Dede Westbrook**	Sr.	6-0	170	●
TE	**Mark Andrews**	So.	6-5	244	●
C	**Jonathan Alvarez**	Jr.	6-3	315	●
RG	**Ben Powers**	So.	6-4	320	
LG	**Cody Ford**	RFr.	6-3	317	
RT	**Dru Samia**	So.	6-4	290	●
LT	**Orlando Brown**	So.	6-8	340	●
K	**Austin Seibert**	So.	5-10	214	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Charles Walker**	Jr.	6-2	305	
NT	**Matthew Romar**	Jr.	6-0	298	●
DE	**Matt Dimon**	Sr.	6-2	275	●
OLB	**Ogbonnia Okoronkwo**	Jr.	6-2	250	
ILB	**Tay Evans**	So.	6-2	239	
ILB	**Jordan Evans**	Sr.	6-2	233	●
OLB	**Caleb Kelly**	Fr.	6-3	230	
CB	**Jordan Thomas**	Jr.	6-0	190	●
CB	**P.J. Mbanasor**	So.	6-1	189	
SS	**Steven Parker**	Jr.	6-1	208	●
FS	**Ahmad Thomas**	Sr.	6-1	210	●
P	**Austin Seibert**	So.	5-10	214	●



Mayfield had 3 INTs versus 23 TDs on throws of 10 or more yards in 2015, the second-best rate in the Power 5.

TOM DIPACE

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.4 ● FPI CHANCE OKLAHOMA WINS

9/3 vs. Houston (NRG Stadium, Houston) **91%** ● **9/10** vs. UL Monroe **99%** ● **9/17** vs. Ohio State **81%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** @ TCU **82%** ● **10/8** vs. Texas (Dallas) **83%** ● **10/15** vs. Kansas State **95%**
10/22 @ Texas Tech **88%** ● **10/29** vs. Kansas **99%** ● **11/3** @ Iowa State **93%**
11/12 vs. Baylor **80%** ● **11/19** @ West Virginia **73%** ● **11/26** BYE ● **12/3** vs. Oklahoma State **77%**

2 Oklahoma State

COACH Mike Gundy (12th season)
94–47 (6–4 in bowl games)

Oklahoma State wants to finish the job after its Big 12 title hopes fell apart with a season-ending three-game losing streak. Replacing Big 12 co-defensive player of the year Emmanuel Ogbah will be tough, but OSU returns one of the league's top QBs in Mason Rudolph, and Stanford graduate transfer Barry Sanders could provide a much-needed boost at running back. —Brandon Chatmon

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (7–2)
BOWL GAME Allstate Sugar Bowl vs. Mississippi, 48-20 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Mason Rudolph: 3,770 yards**
RUSHING **Chris Carson: 517 yards**
RECEIVING **James Washington: 1,087 yards**
TACKLES **Jordan Sterns: 108**
SACKS Emmanuel Ogbah: 13
INTERCEPTIONS **Chad Whitener: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Mason Rudolph
Oklahoma State's hopes of returning to Big 12 title contention rest on the shoulders of Rudolph. After a solid season splitting time with J.W. Walsh, Rudolph is finally the unquestioned leader of the offense. The 6-foot-5, 235-pound junior passed for 3,770 yards, 21 TDs and 9 INTs. He had six 300-yard games (three with more than 400 yards), but his 71.5 adjusted QBR leaves plenty of room for improvement.

X-FACTOR DT Vincent Taylor
Taylor will take on a bigger role after a sophomore season that included 48 tackles, 8½ tackles for loss and five sacks. The 6-3, 310-pounder had five games with at least five tackles. But he won't have Ogbah, who led the Big 12 in sacks, drawing attention on the outside, meaning Taylor will become the focus of opposing offenses for the first time in his career.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
The Cowboys have a tradition of quality running backs, but the well has run dry—they haven't had a 1,000-yard rusher since 2012. Last year's leader, junior college transfer Chris Carson, rushed for 517 yards and four touchdowns but averaged just 3.95 ypc. Now the Cowboys hope to restore their legacy: Barry Sanders (yes, son of the OSU legend) arrives as a graduate transfer from Stanford, where he averaged 5.84 ypc as a reserve. He'll compete with Carson and as many as six other running backs, including two freshmen, for a spot in the lineup.

THE PRESSER

Rudolph passed for 352 yards and five TDs in a win over TCU, but road games at Texas and West Virginia (one TD, five picks) showed that Rudolph's arm might be suspect. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MASON RUDOLPH?** "He's a good player, but he doesn't scare you. I don't think he's dynamic like, say, the kid at Texas Tech. He's a pocket passer and he doesn't have a cannon. He's not Brandon Weeden, even if they want him to be." —Big 12 offensive coach

Oklahoma State has forced 75 turnovers since Glenn Spencer took over as defensive coordinator in 2013, ranking third in the conference. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ATTACKING THE OSU DEFENSE?** "You have to do a good job of deciphering coverage. Glenn will do some different things, like go with a prevent look on second-and-10, so you have to do a good job in practice because you never know what you're going to get." —Big 12 offensive coach

Rudolph helped OSU get out to a 10–0 start last season, but the Cowboys lost to Baylor and Oklahoma after he hurt his foot and then suffered a third straight loss to Ole Miss in the Allstate Sugar Bowl. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW OSU CAN BE LESS RELIANT ON RUDOLPH?** "You know [Rudolph is] a competitor because he makes big plays when they need them. They won so many close games. You have to give him credit because he didn't have a consistent running game. The key for him this year is they have to develop a running game. He needs help." —Big 12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Mason Rudolph**	Jr.	6-5	235	●
RB	**Barry Sanders**	Sr.	5-10	198	●
WR	**James Washington**	Jr.	6-0	205	●
WR	**Marcell Ateman**	Sr.	6-4	215	●
WR	**Jalen McCleskey**	So.	5-10	170	
TE	**Blake Jarwin**	Sr.	6-5	248	●
C	**Brad Lundblade**	Jr.	6-3	300	●
RG	**Jesse Robinson**	Jr.	6-5	315	●
LG	**Michael Wilson**	Sr.	6-6	305	●
RT	**Zachary Crabtree**	Jr.	6-7	310	●
LT	**Victor Salako**	Sr.	6-6	335	●
K	**Ben Grogan**	Sr.	6-1	190	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Tralund Webber**	Jr.	6-5	250	
DT	**Motekiai Maile**	Sr.	6-3	315	●
DT	**Vincent Taylor**	Jr.	6-3	310	●
DE	**Jarrell Owens**	So.	6-3	270	
WLB	**Devante Averette**	Sr.	5-11	230	
MLB	**Chad Whitener**	Jr.	6-0	248	●
SLB	**Jordan Burton**	Sr.	6-3	215	●
CB	**Ramon Richards**	Jr.	5-11	185	
CB	**Ashton Lampkin**	Sr.	6-0	190	●
SS	**Tre Flowers**	Jr.	6-3	198	●
FS	**Jordan Sterns**	Sr.	6-0	200	●
P	**Zach Sinor**	So.	5-10	215	●

59

Rudolph was sixth among Power 5 QBs last year with 59 completions of 20-plus yards.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9 ● **FPI CHANCE OKLAHOMA STATE WINS**

9/3 vs. Southeastern Louisiana **99%** ● **9/10** vs. Central Michigan **94%** ● **9/17** vs. Pittsburgh **76%**
9/24 @ Baylor **45%** ● **10/1** vs. Texas **72%** ● **10/8** vs. Iowa State **92%** ● **10/15** BYE
10/22 @ Kansas **96%** ● **10/29** vs. West Virginia **72%** ● **11/5** @ Kansas State **81%**
11/12 vs. Texas Tech **85%** ● **11/19** @ TCU **59%** ● **11/26** BYE **59%** ● **12/3** @ Oklahoma **23%**

3 Baylor

COACH Art Briles (9th season)
65–37 (3–3 in bowl games)

A College Football Playoff spot is the target a year after injuries sidelined quarterbacks Seth Russell and Jarrett Stidham and ended the Bears' hopes of a third straight Big 12 title. Both quarterbacks return, but coach Art Briles has to replace 237 career starts on the offensive and defensive lines. If he can, Baylor will keep on scoring and again be in the title chase. —B.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (6–3)
BOWL GAME Russell Athletic Bowl vs. North Carolina, 49-38 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Seth Russell: 2,104 yards**
RUSHING **Shock Linwood: 1,329 yards**
RECEIVING Corey Coleman: 1,363 yards
TACKLES Grant Campbell: 97
SACKS Andrew Billings: 5½
INTERCEPTIONS Xavien Howard: 5

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON The quarterbacks
The good news: It can't get as unlucky as last year, right? Russell suffered a neck injury after leading the Bears to a 7–0 start. True freshman Stidham then completed 23 of 33 passes for 419 yards and three scores in his first start on the road at Kansas State before suffering a season-ending ankle injury two games later. Both return, and Briles knows either player has the goods to lead Baylor to a Big 12 title after the duo combined to pass for 3,369 yards and 41 touchdowns with just eight interceptions. With both at full strength, Baylor can afford to rest Russell and preserve his health.

X-FACTOR LB/DB Travon Blanchard
Blanchard should be the defense's top returning playmaker. The junior's tendency to rise to the occasion in big games (29 combined tackles against Oklahoma, Oklahoma State and TCU) could be a key asset for a unit that is a relative unknown. Blanchard's abilities against both the run and the pass make him an ideal hybrid defender in the Big 12.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive line
Andrew Billings became the Big 12's most disruptive defensive force and headed to the NFL draft after a stellar junior season. Baylor is counting on juco transfer Jeremy Faulk to step up in the interior, but frankly, the Bears will need multiple players to replace Billings. DE K.J. Smith and DT Byron Bonds have already combined for 19 starts when filling in due to injuries, and Bonds has played in 33 games. Junior DE Brian Nance had two sacks off the bench last season.

THE PRESSER

Briles' offensive system has always caused problems, but it became nearly impossible to stop when he began landing NFL-level athletes. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OVERALL TALENT IN THE PROGRAM?** "They're getting in the same game as Oklahoma and Texas. They've recruited well. People don't like to hear it, but it's the truth. Offensively, their talent is as good as anyone's. Defensively, they're probably a few classes behind." —Big 12 head coach

The result of the talent increase has been an offense that has averaged an FBS-best 3.24 points per drive and 7.18 yards per play since 2011. The Bears' 1.11 points per drive and 3.53 yards per play on a sloppy, muddy field in a driving rainstorm against TCU a year ago were Baylor's lowest marks during that span. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TRYING TO MATCH BAYLOR'S OFFENSE?** "You kind of know you have to score more. I guess the only way to stop them is chilly weather and a monsoon." —Big 12 offensive coach

Corey Coleman, the 2015 Biletnikoff Award winner, left early for the NFL, but junior KD Cannon easily slides into the No. 1 wideout spot. In his first two seasons, he caught 108 passes for 1,898 yards (17.6 ypc) and 14 touchdowns. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING CANNON?** "He has size, speed and strength. He kind of reminds me of the way Justin Blackmon used to be at Oklahoma State, the way he can kind of control a game. He will seem quiet, then you look up and he's over 100 yards." —Big 12 head coach

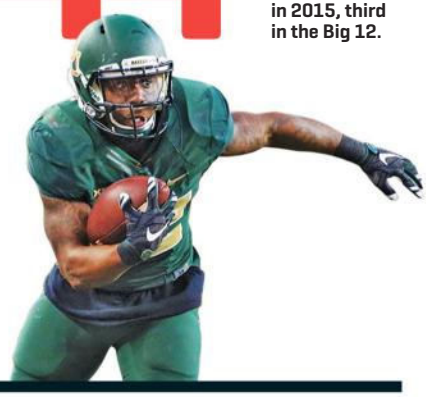
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Seth Russell**	Sr.	6-3	220	●
RB	**Shock Linwood**	Sr.	5-9	200	●
WR	**Tren'Davian Dickson**	Fr.	5-11	170	
WR	**Chris Platt**	So.	5-11	170	
WR	**KD Cannon**	Jr.	6-0	180	●
WR	**Lynx Hawthorne**	Sr.	6-0	205	●
C	**Kyle Fuller**	Sr.	6-5	315	●
RG	**Rami Hammad**	Jr.	6-4	335	
LG	**B.J. Autry**	Jr.	6-3	320	
RT	**Ishmael Wilson**	Jr.	6-4	305	
LT	**Dom Desouza**	Jr.	6-6	310	
K	**Chris Callahan**	Jr.	5-9	200	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Brian Nance**	Jr.	6-3	245	
NT	**Jeremy Faulk**	Jr.	6-1	295	
DE	**K.J. Smith**	Jr.	6-2	260	
OLB	**Taylor Young**	Jr.	5-10	225	●
WLB	**Raaquan Davis**	Jr.	6-2	225	
MLB	**Aiavion Edwards**	Sr.	6-1	225	
OLB	**Travon Blanchard**	Jr.	6-2	205	●
CB	**Jameson Houston**	RFr.	6-0	190	
CB	**Ryan Reid**	Sr.	5-11	190	●
SS	**Chance Waz**	Jr.	6-0	185	●
FS	**Orion Stewart**	Sr.	6-2	200	●
P	**Drew Galitz**	So.	6-0	195	●

44

Linwood had 44 runs of 10 or more yards in 2015, third in the Big 12.



RAY CARLIN/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9 ● **FPI CHANCE BAYLOR WINS**

9/3 vs. Northwestern State **99%** ● **9/10** vs. SMU **95%** ● **9/17** @ Rice **96%**
9/24 vs. Oklahoma State **55%** ● **10/1** @ Iowa State **82%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** vs. Kansas **98%**
10/22 BYE ● **10/29** @ Texas **60%** ● **11/5** vs. TCU **73%** ● **11/12** @ Oklahoma **20%**
11/19 vs. Kansas State **86%** ● **11/25** vs. Texas Tech (Arlington, Texas) **78%** ● **12/3** @ West Virginia **49%**

4 West Virginia

COACH Dana Holgorsen (6th season)
36–28 (2–2 in bowl games)

Dana Holgorsen is known for his offensive prowess, and the Mountaineers likely will need all of his tricks after losing 10 defenders who had double-digit starts in their careers. Eight wins and a bowl victory weren't enough to firm up Holgorsen's future with the Mountaineers as contract talks stalled, making this fall crucial if he wants to avoid the ax before his contract is up in 2017. —B.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (4–5)
BOWL GAME Motel 6 Cactus Bowl vs. Arizona State, 43-42 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Skyler Howard: 3,145 yards**
RUSHING Wendell Smallwood: 1,519 yards
RECEIVING **Shelton Gibson: 887 yards**
TACKLES Nick Kwiatkoski: 86
SACKS **Noble Nwachukwu: 8½**
INTERCEPTIONS Daryl Worley: 6

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Skyler Howard
Howard had an inconsistent 2015 season. He passed for 3,145 yards and 26 touchdowns, but despite a QB-friendly system, he also threw 14 interceptions and surpassed 300 yards just twice. Accuracy was an issue, as he completed less than 50 percent of his passes in four of his 13 starts, and his 55.3 adjusted QBR was seventh in the Big 12. But there is reason for optimism—Howard ended the season by setting Cactus Bowl records with 532 passing yards and five passing TDs in a 43-42 win over Arizona State.

X-FACTOR DE Noble Nwachukwu
Nwachukwu's name rarely comes up when debating the Big 12's top defenders, but he finished his junior season with 8½ sacks and 13 tackles for loss, tied for fourth and 10th, respectively, in the conference. The 6-foot-2, 275-pound senior registered all but one of his sacks against conference opponents, including three in a 38-20 win against Texas.

POSITION BATTLE Cornerback
The Mountaineers will have to replace one of the Big 12's top cornerback duos in Daryl Worley and Terrell Chestnut, key parts of a defense that grabbed 23 interceptions last season, tied for second in the country. But they have three experienced seniors competing for the two vacancies: Antonio Crawford played in 38 games for Miami and sat out last season after transferring, Nana Kyeremeh has appeared in 30 games and 6-2, 208-pound Rasul Douglas played in 11 games last season after transferring from Nassau CC.

THE PRESSER

Defensive coordinator Tony Gibson has a 3-3-5 system built for the spread-heavy Big 12. Last season WVU allowed 24.6 ppg, second only to Oklahoma in the conference, and it ranked fourth in the nation in interception percentage per pass attempt (5.1). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING THE WEST VIRGINIA DEFENSE?** "It's high risk, high reward. Before, their system was an advantage, but more people are doing similar things. A few years ago we'd see that look maybe 20 to 30 percent of the time. This year we'll probably see it 70 percent of the time." —Big 12 head coach

One of the few proven players on defense, Nwachukwu is poised to become a three-year starter for the Mountaineers. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PLANNING TO FACE NWACHUKWU?** "He's a very solid player, but he's not a guy like Emmanuel Ogbah or Eric Striker. He's a guy who can make plays, and you have to account for him, but we didn't spend as much time talking about him." —Big 12 offensive coach

In a departure from Holgorsen's pass-heavy reputation, the Mountaineers relied on the run last season, gaining more first downs on the ground (172) than through the air (150) and averaging 4.77 yards per carry. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM WEST VIRGINIA'S OFFENSE?** "It will be interesting to see if he returns to that Mike Leach style. I think they weren't sure if they had the quarterback, but we'll see what they do this year." —Big 12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Skyler Howard**	Sr.	6-0	207	●
RB	**Rushel Shell**	Sr.	5-10	220	
FB	**Elijah Wellman**	Jr.	6-1	235	
WR	**Daikiel Shorts Jr.**	Sr.	6-1	204	●
WR	**Shelton Gibson**	Jr.	5-11	195	●
WR	**Jovon Durante**	So.	6-0	165	●
C	**Tyler Orlosky**	Sr.	6-4	295	●
RG	**Kyle Bosch**	Jr.	6-5	308	●
LG	**Adam Pankey**	Sr.	6-5	316	●
RT	**Marcell Lazard**	Jr.	6-6	310	
LT	**Yodny Cajuste**	So.	6-5	300	●
K	**Josh Lambert**	Sr.	6-0	203	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Noble Nwachukwu**	Sr.	6-2	275	●
NT	**Darrien Howard**	Sr.	6-1	297	
DE	**Christian Brown**	Sr.	6-2	298	●
SLB	**Xavier Preston**	Jr.	6-2	236	
WLB	**Sean Walters**	Sr.	6-2	228	
MLB	**Al-Rasheed Benton**	Jr.	6-1	235	
DB	**Marvin Gross Jr.**	Jr.	6-3	208	
CB	**Nana Kyeremeh**	Sr.	5-10	186	
CB	**Rasul Douglas**	Sr.	6-2	208	
SS	**Jarrod Harper**	Sr.	6-0	210	●
FS	**Dravon Askew-Henry**	Jr.	5-11	198	●
P	**Billy Kinney**	So.	6-4	207	

24

Gibson averaged 24 yards per reception, second best in the FBS.

SHANE ROPER/CAL SPORT MEDIA/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.9 ● **FPI CHANCE WEST VIRGINIA WINS**

9/3 vs. Missouri **80%** ● **9/10** vs. Youngstown State **97%** ● **9/17** BYE
9/24 vs. BYU (Landover, Maryland) **77%** ● **10/1** vs. Kansas State **84%** ● **10/8** BYE
10/15 @ Texas Tech **64%** ● **10/22** vs. TCU **65%** ● **10/29** @ Oklahoma State **28%** ● **11/5** vs. Kansas **96%**
11/12 @ Texas **44%** ● **11/19** vs. Oklahoma **27%** ● **11/26** @ Iowa State **76%** ● **12/3** vs. Baylor **51%**

5 Texas

COACH Charlie Strong (3rd season)
11–14 (0–1 in bowl games)

It's make-or-break time for third-year coach Charlie Strong, who has yet to deliver a winning record in Austin. Strong has put together impressive recruiting classes, including a top-10 haul this year. But if Texas doesn't begin to show progress on the field, Strong might not survive. His hopes are riding on a new offense, but does Texas have the QB to run it? —J.T.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (4–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Jerrod Heard: 1,214 yards**
RUSHING **D'Onta Foreman: 681 yards**
RECEIVING **John Burt: 457 yards**
TACKLES Peter Jinkens: 75
SACKS Peter Jinkens: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS **Dylan Haines: 5**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Malik Jefferson
There might not be a more dynamic defender in the Big 12 than Jefferson, a sophomore who already has become the face and vocal leader of the Texas defense. Strong put him in the lineup right out of the gate and started Jefferson nine times. The reigning Big 12 defensive freshman of the year was second on the team with 61 tackles, seven for loss, and scored on a fumble return against Rice.

X-FACTOR WR John Burt
Last season Texas didn't have a single pass catcher finish in the top 20 in the Big 12 in receiving. But as the Longhorns transition into a version of the Baylor offense under new coordinator Sterlin Gilbert, they will have to find a standout receiver or two to make the attack work. One option will be 6-foot-3 sophomore Burt, a former ESPN 300 signee who led Texas with 457 receiving yards last season as a true freshman.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
No surprise here. The Longhorns have endured quarterback turmoil dating all the way back to Colt McCoy's graduation seven years ago, which is the biggest reason Texas hasn't reached double-digit wins since making the 2009 national title game. Last season Texas juggled Jerrod Heard and Tyrone Swoopes with little success. That means the Longhorns will stage yet another QB derby, among Heard, Swoopes and highly touted incoming freshman Shane Buechele. Despite Swoopes' struggles, his edge in experience could make him the favorite to open as the starter.

THE PRESSER

The Longhorns ranked last in the Big 12 in passing in 2015, finishing with just nine touchdown passes—the same total as Navy, which runs a triple-option offense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TEXAS' QBs?** "To be honest, that position right now is the difference between them winning six games and them winning 10 games. You can hone in on what they do and cheat your coverage because of their quarterbacks' inability to throw the football." —Big 12 defensive coach

Strong brought in Gilbert, a disciple of Art Briles' fast-paced philosophy, from Tulsa to improve the Longhorns' passing game. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TEXAS' PERSONNEL IN THE NEW OFFENSE?** "It's not as easy as people think it is to put that in. You have to be able to practice it the right way. Do they have a quarterback to run it? Who knows? We will have to wait and see. That system didn't become great until [former Baylor quarterback] Robert Griffin started running it." —Big 12 offensive coach

As a true freshman, Jefferson recorded nine tackles in each of his first three games, then followed that up with two sacks in the Longhorns' upset of Oklahoma. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT JEFFERSON?** "He's unbelievably talented. I think he's going to be one of the best players in the league. Great size, great athleticism, very instinctual. Can rush off the edge, can play the run, can drop into coverage. An excellent player." —Big 12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Shane Buechele**	Fr.	6-1	191	●
RB	**Chris Warren III**	So.	6-2	255	
WR	**John Burt**	So.	6-3	189	●
WR	**Armanti Foreman**	Jr.	5-11	209	●
WR	**Collin Johnson**	Fr.	6-6	212	
TE	**Andrew Beck**	Jr.	6-3	244	●
C	**Zach Shackelford**	Fr.	6-3	296	
RG	**Jake McMillon**	So.	6-3	294	
LG	**Patrick Vahe**	So.	6-3	326	●
RT	**Kent Perkins**	Sr.	6-5	320	●
LT	**Connor Williams**	So.	6-6	288	●
K	**Jon Coppens**	RFr.	6-0	198	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Charles Omenihu**	So.	6-6	262	●
NT	**Paul Boyette Jr.**	Sr.	6-3	314	●
DT	**Poona Ford**	Jr.	5-11	313	
DE	**Naashon Hughes**	Jr.	6-4	239	●
SLB	**Anthony Wheeler**	So.	6-2	232	
MLB	**Malik Jefferson**	So.	6-3	238	●
WLB	**Timothy Cole**	Sr.	6-1	240	
CB	**Holton Hill**	So.	6-2	195	●
CB	**Davante Davis**	So.	6-2	199	●
SS	**Brandon Jones**	Fr.	6-0	195	●
FS	**Jason Hall**	Jr.	6-3	219	●
P	**Michael Dickson**	So.	6-2	213	●

3

Jefferson had three of the four pass breakups by Texas linebackers in 2015.

MATTHEW EMMONS/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.0 ● FPI CHANCE TEXAS WINS

9/4 vs. Notre Dame **46%** ● **9/10** vs. UTEP **98%** ● **9/17** @ California **56%** ● **9/24** BYE
10/1 @ Oklahoma State **28%** ● **10/8** vs. Oklahoma (Dallas) **17%** ● **10/15** vs. Iowa State **85%**
10/22 @ Kansas State **66%** ● **10/29** vs. Baylor **40%** ● **11/5** @ Texas Tech **58%**
11/12 vs. West Virginia **56%** ● **11/19** @ Kansas **91%** ● **11/25** vs. TCU **61%**

6 TCU

COACH Gary Patterson (16th season)
143–47 (9–5 in bowl games)

What will life be like after Trevone Boykin? The Horned Frogs quickly rose to the upper echelon of the Big 12 with 23 wins over the past two seasons as Boykin became one of the nation's best quarterbacks. Texas A&M transfer Kenny Hill is ready to step in, but he'll have to break in a go-to receiver to keep TCU in the chase for a second Big 12 title in three seasons. —B.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11–2 (7–2)
BOWL GAME Valero Alamo Bowl vs. Oregon, 47-41 W (3OT)
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Trevone Boykin: 3,575 yards
RUSHING Aaron Green: 1,272 yards
RECEIVING Josh Doctson: 1,327 yards
TACKLES **Travin Howard: 105**
SACKS **Josh Carraway: 9**
INTERCEPTIONS Derrick Kindred: 2

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Kenny Hill
Hill impressed coaches while running the scout team in 2015, yet he has gigantic shoes to fill with Boykin's departure. TCU's offense has been among the nation's best since co-coordinators Doug Meacham and Sonny Cumbie arrived two seasons ago. With Boykin running the new system, the Horned Frogs averaged 6.73 yards per play after averaging 5.29 in 2012 and '13. Hill, who threw for 2,649 yards, 23 touchdowns and eight interceptions in eight starts for the Aggies in 2014, has to maintain that standard.

X-FACTOR DE James McFarland
McFarland entered the offseason a forgotten man after missing 2015 with a broken toe suffered when he stepped on a sprinkler head. But the defensive MVP of the 2014 Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl is set to provide pass-rushing punch for a Horned Frogs defense that needs to be much improved. McFarland had seven sacks and three forced fumbles in 2014. Last season TCU finished fifth in the Big 12 with 32 sacks. With three other injured players now healthy, the defense could return 11 vets with starting experience.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
Replacing TCU's go-to receiver, Josh Doctson, goes hand in hand with breaking in a new quarterback. The Frogs signed coveted junior college transfer Taj Williams and will feature junior Emanuel Porter and dynamic sophomore slot receiver KaVontae Turpin (45 catches, 649 yards, 8 TDs), but there is no proven No. 1 target on the roster.

THE PRESSER

Hill replaced Johnny Manziel at Texas A&M and threw for 511 yards and three TDs against South Carolina in his first start. But he struggled against Mississippi State, Ole Miss and Alabama—throwing six touchdowns and six interceptions—and lost his starting job, sparking questions about his performance against top teams. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT KENNY HILL TAKING OVER?** "I like Hill and what he did at Texas A&M, but he has a ways to go to fill Boykin's shoes. They may need to make up [the difference in production] in other ways." —Big 12 offensive coach

TCU has had the Big 12's best defense since joining the conference in 2012, allowing a league best in points per drive (1.66) and yards per play (5.25) in conference games over that time. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW YOU GAME-PLAN FOR TCU'S DEFENSE?** "Gary does a good job stopping the run, using run fits, clogging up the middle. They're just not going to let you run it. You have to be able to throw the ball against them if you want to have success." —Big 12 head coach

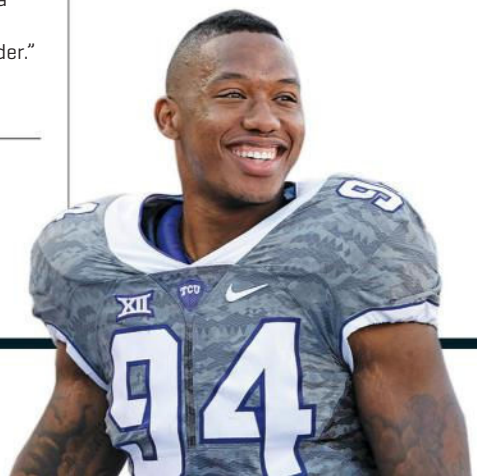
Last season against Texas, Turpin had 138 receiving yards and hauled in four touchdowns, the most in a game by a freshman in Big 12 history. Though he's just 5-foot-9 and 152 pounds, Turpin will again be counted on as an all-purpose threat. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER KaVONTAE TURPIN IS UP TO THE TASK?** "He's shifty, a playmaker. He has the skills that fit in our league. And he has that chip on his shoulder." —Big 12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Kenny Hill**	Jr.	6-1	215	
RB	**Kyle Hicks**	Jr.	5-10	200	
WR	**KaVontae Turpin**	So.	5-9	152	●
WR	**Deante' Gray**	Sr.	5-10	175	
WR	**Ty Slanina**	Jr.	6-0	193	●
WR	**John Diarse**	Jr.	6-1	209	
C	**Austin Schlottman**	Jr.	6-6	300	
RG	**Matt Pryor**	Jr.	6-7	350	
LG	**Patrick Morris**	Jr.	6-3	300	
RT	**Aviante Collins**	Sr.	6-6	295	
LT	**Joseph Noteboom**	Jr.	6-5	320	●
K	**Jonathan Song**	So.	5-10	170	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Josh Carraway**	Sr.	6-4	250	●
DT	**Breylin Mitchell**	So.	6-4	270	●
DT	**Aaron Curry**	Sr.	6-2	280	●
DE	**James McFarland**	Sr.	6-3	255	
MLB	**Montrel Wilson**	So.	6-3	208	●
SLB	**Travin Howard**	Jr.	6-1	210	●
CB	**Ranthony Texada**	Jr.	5-10	170	●
CB	**Jeff Gladney**	RFr.	5-10	175	
WS	**Nick Orr**	Jr.	5-10	180	●
SS	**Denzel Johnson**	Sr.	6-2	205	●
FS	**Markell Simmons**	So.	6-1	205	
P	**Adam Nunez**	RFr.	6-0	180	

9 Carraway was the only FBS player with at least nine sacks and three fumble recoveries in 2015.



TONY GUTIERREZ/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.1 ● FPI CHANCE TCU WINS

9/3 vs. South Dakota State **23%** ● **9/10** vs. Arkansas **53%** ● **9/17** vs. Iowa State **84%**
9/23 @ SMU **84%** ● **10/1** vs. Oklahoma **18%** ● **10/8** @ Kansas **90%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** @ West Virginia **36%** ● **10/29** vs. Texas Tech **71%** ● **11/5** @ Baylor **27%**
11/12 BYE ● **11/19** vs. Oklahoma State **41%** ● **11/25** @ Texas **39%** ● **12/3** vs. Kansas State **79%**

7 Texas Tech

COACH Kliff Kingsbury (4th season)
19–19 (1–1 in bowl games)

After failing to reach a bowl game in his second season, coach Kliff Kingsbury bounced back with seven wins in 2015. Texas Tech has continued to struggle defensively under Kingsbury, but with electric junior quarterback Patrick Mahomes, Tech won't have a problem lighting up scoreboards. But becoming a factor in the Big 12 title race, well ... —J.T.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (4–5)
BOWL GAME Advocare V100 Texas Bowl vs. LSU, 56-27 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Patrick Mahomes: 4,653 yards**
RUSHING DeAndre Washington: 1,492 yards
RECEIVING Jakeem Grant: 1,268 yards
TACKLES Micah Awe: 126
SACKS Pete Robertson: 5
INTERCEPTIONS J.J. Gaines: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Patrick Mahomes
In his first season as the full-time starter, Mahomes finished fourth in the country with 357.9 passing yards a game last year. He also tossed 36 touchdowns (tied for the Big 12 lead with Baker Mayfield) while rushing for 456 yards and 10 scores. The Red Raiders graduated key players at every other position offensively from last year's dynamic scoring attack. But with Mahomes, Texas Tech could still feature its best offense yet under Kingsbury.

X-FACTOR DT Breiden Fehoko
Last season the defense allowed 279.9 rushing yards per game, ranking 126th in the nation, ahead of only Eastern Michigan. The Red Raiders have been searching for an impact player on the defensive line whom they can build around, and they might finally have found him in Fehoko, a 6-foot-3, 295-pound sophomore. The prized recruit (No. 51 in the ESPN 300) started every game at defensive tackle as a true freshman last year and will have the benefit of playing with two eligible transfers, DT Ondre Pipkins (Michigan) and LB Kolin Hill (Notre Dame).

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
With record-breaking wideout Jakeem Grant gone, Mahomes is looking for his next go-to receiver. The Red Raiders have intriguing options, including Derrick Willies, the No. 1 juco receiver in the country, who chose Tech over Oklahoma. But keep an eye on Dylan Cantrell, who is healthy after missing last year with a back injury. Cantrell and Mahomes starred together in high school in Whitehouse, Texas.

THE PRESSER

Since Mahomes took over as starting QB in November 2014, he has tossed 50 touchdowns. No returning quarterback in college football has thrown for more over that span. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MAHOMES?** "He's the best quarterback in the Big 12, from seeing the field and distributing the ball to being able to run. He's big and tough to bring down. I really like his skill set. Now that he has given up baseball [he played outfield and pitched for Tech], I think he's going to be even better." —Big 12 defensive coach

Last year David Gibbs became Texas Tech's seventh defensive coordinator in as many seasons. The team showed little improvement, finishing next to last in the country in stopping the run. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TEXAS TECH'S DEFENSE?** "It's been so many years in a row where they've had a new DC. That's going to hurt you. But Gibbs will do a hell of a job. He's a really good coach. It's not going to happen overnight. But I think he'll get that thing going." —Big 12 offensive coach

After finishing second in the nation in passing last season, Texas Tech brings back all but one key target, but that guy happens to be Grant, the school's all-time leading receiver. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TECH'S PASSING GAME?** "Kliff did a great job of game-planning ways of getting Jakeem the ball in space. But there's not a guy there now that can make nine guys miss and go 90 yards. They're going to have a different mindset. Kliff might have to be a little more patient." —Big 12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Patrick Mahomes**	Jr.	6-5	230	●
RB	**Justin Stockton**	Jr.	5-10	200	
WR	**Devin Lauderdale**	Sr.	5-10	180	●
WR	**Reginald Davis**	Sr.	6-0	185	●
WR	**Ian Sadler**	Jr.	5-11	195	●
WR	**Cameron Batson**	Jr.	5-9	175	
C	**Tony Morales**	Sr.	6-3	295	●
RG	**Justin Murphy**	So.	6-6	310	
LG	**Madison Akamnonu**	RFr.	6-5	310	●
RT	**Terence Steele**	RFr.	6-6	300	
LT	**Baylon Brown**	Sr.	6-5	305	●
K	**Clayton Hatfield**	So.	5-10	170	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Zach Barnes**	Jr.	6-3	240	
NG	**Broderick Washington**	RFr.	6-3	305	
DT	**Breiden Fehoko**	So.	6-3	295	●
DE	**Gary Moore**	Jr.	6-5	240	
WLB	**D'Vonta Hinton**	So.	5-9	225	
MLB	**Dakota Allen**	So.	6-2	225	●
SLB	**Malik Jenkins**	Sr.	6-1	225	●
CB	**Justis Nelson**	Sr.	6-2	180	●
CB	**Thierry Nguema**	Sr.	5-10	175	●
SS	**Keenon Ward**	Sr.	5-9	200	●
FS	**Jah'Shawn Johnson**	So.	5-10	180	●
P	**Michael Barden**	So.	5-10	175	

9.6

Mahomes scored on 9.6 percent of his non-sack carries (10 TDs in 104 attempts).

THOMAS B. SHEA/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.8 ● **FPI CHANCE TEXAS TECH WINS**

9/3 vs. Stephen F. Austin **99%** ● **9/10** @ Arizona State **42%** ● **9/17** vs. Louisiana Tech **87%**
9/24 BYE ● **9/29** vs. Kansas **92%** ● **10/8** @ Kansas State **52%** ● **10/15** vs. West Virginia **36%**
10/22 vs. Oklahoma **13%** ● **10/29** @ TCU **29%** ● **11/5** vs. Texas **42%** ● **11/12** @ Oklahoma State **15%**
11/19 @ Iowa State **58%** ● **11/25** vs. Baylor (Arlington, Texas) **22%**

8 Kansas State

COACH Bill Snyder (25th season)
193-101-1 (7-10 in bowl games)

Despite speculation that he might retire, Bill Snyder is back for his 25th season after somehow guiding Kansas State to a bowl game. With last year's two best QBs finally healthy, the Wildcats should be able to choose the best of four options. Loaded again defensively, they could be a Big 12 sleeper if they can find—and keep—the right game manager under center. —J.T.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6-7 (3-6)
BOWL GAME AutoZone Liberty Bowl vs. Arkansas, 45-23 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Joe Hubener: 1,837 yards**
RUSHING **Charles Jones: 696 yards**
RECEIVING **Deante Burton: 510 yards**
TACKLES **Elijah Lee: 80**
SACKS **Jordan Willis: 9½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Elijah Lee: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Elijah Lee
The Wildcats have several proven performers coming back defensively, but Lee might be the most important. A second-team All-Big 12 selection last season, Lee is a versatile defender and tenacious pass rusher off the edge who led the team in tackles (80) and interceptions (three) last year. At 6-foot-3, 218 pounds, he has the length and athleticism to be a playmaking force.

X-FACTOR S Dante Barnett
The MVP and glue of K-State's defense two years ago, Barnett is back after missing virtually all of last season with a shoulder injury. Barnett, who has started 29 career games, has a nose for the ball, resulting in seven career interceptions. If he can rediscover his form of two seasons ago, K-State will have a chance to be far more opportunistic defensively after finishing tied for last in the Big 12 in 2015 with just five picks.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Injuries ravaged the Wildcats at quarterback last season, as both Jesse Ertz and Alex Delton were lost for the year with knee injuries before the start of conference play. Ertz initially won the job coming out of fall camp, and Snyder once compared Delton with former K-State great Ell Roberson. Ertz and Delton are healthy again and will challenge former walk-on Joe Hubener, who completed just 47.6 percent of his passes after being forced into the lineup last season. Freshman Skylar Thompson, a four-star recruit, is a wild card in the four-way battle.

THE PRESSER

Hubener, who had never started a game at QB, even in high school, became the starter by default. He lost the job late in the year to receiver-turned-QB Kody Cook, who is gone. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE K-STATE QBs?** "Snyder offenses have always excelled with second-year QBs. This year could be different, because the one that started last year due to injuries [Hubener] may not be the best QB to run what he wants to run. They may be faced with the dilemma of a year's worth of experience at that position versus going through the growing pains of another first-year guy." —Big 12 defensive coach

K-State topped the conference in time of possession. As a result, the Wildcats were able to keep explosive Big 12 offenses sidelined. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT K-STATE'S STYLE?** "When you get the football, it puts that much more pressure on you to get points. And they do such a great job, they're going to find a way to run the football. They're just really tough to play, especially on the road up there." —Big 12 offensive coach

Kickers Matthew McCrane and Nick Walsh and returner Dominique Heath are back on another vintage K-State special-teams unit. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR SPECIAL TEAMS?** "The thing I worry about when getting ready for Kansas State is their special-teams coach [Sean Snyder]. I'd hate to win on offense and win on defense, then have a big play or a big return win the game for them. That's what happened to West Virginia at the end of the year." —Big 12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Jesse Ertz**	Jr.	6-3	205	●
RB	**Charles Jones**	Sr.	5-10	206	●
FB	**Winston Dimel**	So.	6-1	235	●
WR	**Byron Pringle**	So.	6-2	212	
WR	**Deante Burton**	Sr.	6-2	205	●
TE	**Dayton Valentine**	So.	6-4	262	
C	**Dalton Risner**	So.	6-5	300	●
RG	**Will Ash**	Sr.	6-3	325	
LG	**Terrale Johnson**	Sr.	6-1	303	
RT	**Abdul Beecham**	So.	6-3	283	
LT	**Scott Frantz**	RFr.	6-5	275	
K	**Matthew McCrane**	Jr.	5-10	165	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Jordan Willis**	Sr.	6-5	250	●
DT	**Will Geary**	Jr.	6-0	297	●
DT	**Trey Dishon**	RFr.	6-2	317	
DE	**Reggie Walker**	RFr.	6-2	239	
LB	**Elijah Lee**	Jr.	6-3	218	●
LB	**Will Davis**	Sr.	6-0	224	●
LB	**Charmeachealle Moore**	Sr.	6-0	221	
CB	**Duke Shelley**	So.	5-9	160	●
CB	**Donnie Starks**	Sr.	6-0	180	●
SS	**Dante Barnett**	Sr.	6-1	193	●
FS	**Kendall Adams**	So.	6-1	213	
P	**Nick Walsh**	Jr.	5-11	212	●

1

Lee was the only Big 12 player who had at least five sacks and three picks last season.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.9 ● **FPI CHANCE KANSAS STATE WINS**

9/2 @ Stanford **13%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** vs. Florida Atlantic **91%** ● **9/24** vs. Missouri State **99%**
10/1 @ West Virginia **16%** ● **10/8** vs. Texas Tech **49%** ● **10/15** @ Oklahoma **5%**
10/22 vs. Texas **34%** ● **10/29** @ Iowa State **46%** ● **11/5** vs. Oklahoma State **19%**
11/12 BYE ● **11/19** @ Baylor **14%** ● **11/26** vs. Kansas **88%** ● **12/3** @ TCU **21%**

9 Iowa State

COACH Matt Campbell (1st season)

The Cyclones turned to Toledo's Matt Campbell after Paul Rhoads failed to reach a bowl game for the third straight season. Much like the 36-year-old Campbell—the youngest coach at a Power 5 school—Iowa State has potential, most notably running back Mike Warren, last season's Big 12 offensive freshman of the year. Now it's time to turn that promise into progress. —J.T.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (2-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Sam B. Richardson: 1,443 yards
RUSHING **Mike Warren: 1,339 yards**
RECEIVING **Allen Lazard: 808 yards**
TACKLES **Brian Peavy: 82**
SACKS Dale Pierson: 8½
INTERCEPTIONS **Brian Peavy: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Mike Warren
Warren emerged as one of the top running backs in the league last season, finishing fourth in the Big 12 with 1,339 rushing yards despite getting just nine carries in the first two games. The new coaching regime is very familiar with Warren, and not just because he gained 126 yards when the Cyclones faced Toledo last September. Warren originally committed to Campbell and Toledo out of high school before later flipping to Iowa State.

X-FACTOR DB Kamari Cotton-Moya
In 2014, Cotton-Moya was the Big 12 defensive freshman of the year. Last season, however, he missed Iowa State's final six games with a hamstring injury after registering 40 tackles in the first six games. If he remains healthy, the Cyclones could feature one of the top defensive backfields in the Big 12, with proven cornerbacks Nigel Tribune, Jomal Wiltz and Brian Peavy flanking him.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
Up front, the Cyclones return left tackle Jake Campos, who has made 23 career starts. But elsewhere on the offensive line, Iowa State will be starting from scratch. Standout guard Daniel Burton left the program because of injuries, and Rhode Island graduate transfer Tyler Catalina backed out of his Iowa State commitment to enroll at Georgia instead. Those twists could open the door for the gem of Campbell's first recruiting class, Sean Foster, a 6-foot-8, 285-pound four-star recruit at offensive tackle, to challenge for the spot opposite Campos immediately.

THE PRESSER

The Cyclones have not escaped the bottom three in the Big 12 in scoring since 2005. Last year Toledo averaged 35 ppg, 10 more than Iowa State averaged. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE NEW STAFF?** "With Matt's background and what he did at Toledo, that will help. In this day and age in the Big 12, you've got to be able to score and you've got to be able to keep up. That's the path they're taking. I think that will help them." —Big 12 head coach

After taking over for Sam B. Richardson at quarterback in late October, Joel Lanning ranked fifth in the Big 12 in QBR for the remainder of the regular season. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LANNING?** "He's big, athletic and played his tail off. I couldn't have been more impressed watching him those last couple of games. As the year went on, it looked like he threw the ball better and they trusted him. If his development continues with the wideouts they have coming back, that's a good-looking offense." —Big 12 head coach

Warren, Iowa State's first Big 12 offensive freshman of the year, torched rivals with five 100-yard games in conference play. Despite gaining 2,512 yards as a senior at Oklahoma's Lawton High, he got no other Big 12 offers. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WARREN?** "Warren had one of the most impressive seasons among Big 12 backs. After the changes and injuries that Iowa State faced last year, he consistently performed. A number of Big 12 schools screwed up in letting him sign that far north." —Big 12 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Joel Lanning**	Jr.	6-2	232	●
RB	**Mike Warren**	So.	6-0	200	●
WR	**Allen Lazard**	Jr.	6-5	223	●
WR	**Dondre Daley**	Sr.	6-2	191	
WR	**Jauan Wesley**	Jr.	5-11	181	●
TE	**Clifford Fernandez**	Jr.	6-3	255	
C	**Julian Good-Jones**	RFr.	6-5	270	
RG	**Patrick Scoggins**	Sr.	6-1	293	
LG	**Nick Fett**	Sr.	6-7	313	
RT	**Jake Campos**	Jr.	6-8	297	●
LT	**Jaypee Philbert Jr.**	Jr.	6-5	314	
K	**Cole Netten**	Sr.	6-1	224	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**J.D. Waggoner**	Jr.	6-3	250	●
DT	**Demond Tucker**	Sr.	6-0	296	●
DT	**Pierre Aka**	Sr.	6-4	293	
DE	**Gabe Luna**	Sr.	6-2	243	
WLB	**Willie Harvey**	So.	6-0	222	●
MLB	**Kane Seeley**	Sr.	6-2	239	
SLB	**D'Andre Payne**	So.	5-10	186	●
CB	**Brian Peavy**	So.	5-9	184	●
CB	**Jomal Wiltz**	Sr.	5-10	174	●
SS	**Kamari Cotton-Moya**	Jr.	6-1	197	●
FS	**Mike Johnson**	RFr.	5-11	182	●
P	**Colin Downing**	Jr.	5-11	187	●

132

Warren's 132 rush ypg in conference play last year was the best in the Big 12.

LUKE LU/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.2 ● FPI CHANCE IOWA STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Northern Iowa **78%** ● **9/10** @ Iowa **21%** ● **9/17** @ TCU **16%**
9/24 vs. San Jose State **65%** ● **10/1** vs. Baylor **18%** ● **10/8** @ Oklahoma State **8%**
10/15 @ Texas **15%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Kansas State **54%** ● **11/3** vs. Oklahoma **7%**
11/12 @ Kansas **74%** ● **11/19** vs. Texas Tech **43%** ● **11/26** vs. West Virginia **24%**

10 Kansas

COACH David Beaty (2nd season)
0–12 (0–0 in bowl games)

All the old clichés—it's a rebuilding year, the cupboard is bare, just wait until he has his own guys—don't even begin to describe the situation for second-year Kansas coach David Beaty. The 2015 Jayhawks had 33 first-time starters, 10 of them freshmen, and lost their top two QBs to injuries. And yet there's hope for a win. As the saying goes: If you can't beat 'em, schedule Rhode Island. —B.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 0–12 (0–9)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Ryan Willis: 1,719 yards**
RUSHING **Ke'aun Kinner: 566 yards**
RECEIVING Tre' Parmalee: 599 yards
TACKLES **Fish Smithson: 111**
SACKS Ben Goodman: 5½
INTERCEPTIONS **Fish Smithson: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON The losing streaks
At Kansas, there is no avoiding two bleak reminders of futility. After an 0–12 season, the Jayhawks have now lost 15 straight games and 20 of their last 21, and they were hammered in nine conference games last year by an average score of 48-12. Hold up, now. Circle Sept. 3 on your calendars! The Jayhawks open the season hosting Rhode Island, an FCS team that went 1–10 last year. But fear not, fans of schadenfreude: If the Jayhawks win that one, the road streak will still be intact. Kansas hasn't won a game away from Memorial Stadium since it beat UTEP on Sept. 12, 2009—a string of 38 losses.

X-FACTOR WR LaQuvionte Gonzalez
The junior receiver, a 5-foot-10, 176-pound transfer from Texas A&M with 4.4 speed and a 41-inch vertical, could provide a big-play threat. Beaty was his position coach at A&M and promises to get creative with Gonzalez to get him the ball in as many ways as possible. In 16 games with the Aggies, he had 26 catches for 317 yards and two touchdowns.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Ryan Willis flashed some promise, throwing for a Kansas freshman record 1,719 yards and nine touchdowns. But he also threw 10 picks, was sacked 3.1 times per game (most in the Big 12) and completed just 52.1 percent of his passes. Redshirt freshman Carter Stanley will also get a shot at the job, and senior Montell Cozart returns with 11 career starts, including last year's first four games before a shoulder injury ended his season.

THE PRESSER

Beaty's winless debut wasn't a surprise, but it also couldn't have gone much worse, beginning with dropping a 41-38 heartbreaker to FCS South Dakota State in the season opener. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STATE OF THE KANSAS PROGRAM?** "He took over a disaster, but I think he did a good job. They'll get some guys, but it's going to take a long time. They have to give him some time. He's going to need about eight years to get that program right. And it's not easy up there." —Big 12 head coach

The Jayhawks can be an unexpected test in Lawrence, despite a 2–20 Big 12 home record over the past five years. Baylor, TCU, Texas and Oklahoma State have all barely escaped with single-digit wins. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING THE JAYHAWKS ON THE ROAD?** "They're spooky. Unless you're Texas, Oklahoma or Baylor and you can go up there and overwhelm them athletically, you kind of have to watch it with them. You can go up there, they'll have like 20,000 in the stands and they can get you." —Big 12 head coach

Kansas nearly pulled the upset of the year, falling at TCU 23-17 in mid-November. The Jayhawks' tightest conference loss was a sign Beaty has his young players buying into his energetic approach. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW IT'S EVEN POSSIBLE TO TURN THIS THING AROUND?** "First you find guys who want to be there. Then you recruit, recruit, recruit, with an eye on competing in Year 3 or 4. You have to teach them to compete. Teach them how to win." —Big 12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Ryan Willis**	So.	6-4	211	●
RB	**Ke'aun Kinner**	Sr.	5-9	191	●
WR	**Steven Sims Jr.**	So.	5-10	176	●
WR	**Tyler Patrick**	So.	6-0	177	●
WR	**LaQuvionte Gonzalez**	Jr.	5-10	176	
TE	**Ben Johnson**	Jr.	6-5	245	●
C	**Joe Gibson**	Jr.	6-3	310	
RG	**D'Andre Banks**	Sr.	6-3	310	●
LG	**Jacob Bragg**	So.	6-4	291	
RT	**Larry Hughes**	So.	6-7	309	●
LT	**Jordan Shelley-Smith**	Sr.	6-5	302	●
K	**Nick Bartolotta**	Jr.	5-6	189	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Dorance Armstrong Jr.**	So.	6-4	241	●
NT	**Isi Holani**	Jr.	6-3	325	
DT	**Daniel Wise**	So.	6-3	290	●
DE	**Anthonoy Olobia**	Sr.	6-5	247	
LB	**Joe Dineen Jr.**	Jr.	6-2	225	●
LB	**Marcquis Roberts**	Sr.	6-1	223	●
NB	**Tevin Shaw**	Sr.	5-11	206	●
CB	**Marnez Ogletree**	Sr.	5-10	190	
CB	**Brandon Stewart**	Sr.	6-0	178	●
SS	**Tyrone Miller Jr.**	So.	6-0	182	●
FS	**Fish Smithson**	Sr.	5-11	201	●
P	**Quinton Conaway**	Fr.	6-1	207	●

7.9

Smithson led the nation in solo tackles with 7.9 (10.1 total) per game.

JEFF JACOBSEN/UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

SCHEDULE

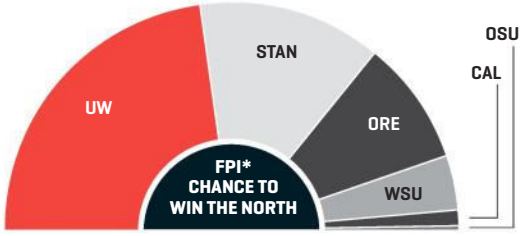
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 2.5 ● **FPI CHANCE KANSAS WINS**

9/3 vs. Rhode Island **97%** ● **9/10** vs. Ohio **57%** ● **9/17** @ Memphis **21%**
9/24 BYE ● **9/29** @ Texas Tech **8%** ● **10/8** vs. TCU **10%** ● **10/15** @ Baylor **2%**
10/22 vs. Oklahoma State **4%** ● **10/29** @ Oklahoma **1%** ● **11/5** @ West Virginia **4%**
11/12 vs. Iowa State **26%** ● **11/19** vs. Texas **9%** ● **11/26** @ Kansas State **12%**

PAC-12

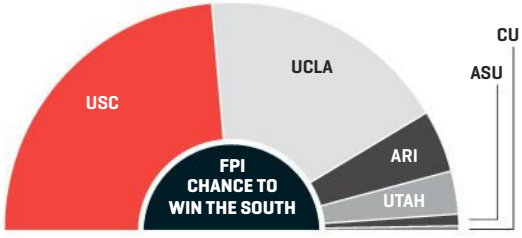
Pac-12 outlook

NORTH	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
WASHINGTON	13	45.8%
STANFORD	18	26.1%
OREGON	28	17.6%
WASHINGTON STATE	41	7.9%
CALIFORNIA	49	2.4%
OREGON STATE	72	0.3%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

SOUTH	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
USC	8	47.4%
UCLA	19	35.5%
ARIZONA	32	9.3%
UTAH	37	6.1%
ARIZONA STATE	47	1.3%
COLORADO	59	0.5%



AVERAGE FPI RANK
35.3

PROJECTED CHAMPION
30%
USC

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

RB	**Christian McCaffrey**	Jr.	Stanford

ALL-PAC-12

QB	**Josh Rosen**	So.	UCLA
RB	**Christian McCaffrey**	Jr.	Stanford
RB	**Royce Freeman**	Jr.	Oregon
WR	**JuJu Smith-Schuster**	Jr.	USC
WR	**Gabe Marks**	Sr.	Washington State
TE	**Dalton Schultz**	Jr.	Stanford
OL	**Zach Banner**	Sr.	USC
OL	**Conor McDermott**	Sr.	UCLA
OL	**Damien Mama**	Jr.	USC
OL	**Chris Borrayo**	Sr.	California
OL	**Riley Sorenson**	Sr.	Washington State

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

S	**Budda Baker**	Jr.	Washington

ALL-PAC-12

DL	**Eddie Vanderdoes**	Jr.	UCLA
DL	**Lowell Lotulelei**	Jr.	Utah
DL	**Elijah Qualls**	Jr.	Washington
DL	**Hunter Dimick**	Sr.	Utah
LB	**Azeem Victor**	Jr.	Washington
LB	**Cameron Smith**	So.	USC
LB	**Salamo Fiso**	Sr.	Arizona State
CB	**Sidney Jones**	Jr.	Washington
CB	**Adoree' Jackson**	Jr.	USC
S	**Budda Baker**	Jr.	Washington
S	**Marcus Williams**	Jr.	Utah

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Aidan Schneider**	Jr.	Oregon
P	**Matt Haack**	Sr.	Arizona State
RS	**Dante Pettis**	Jr.	Washington

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER
- **9/3** USC vs. Alabama (94*)
- **9/17** USC @ Stanford (87)
- **9/30** Stanford @ Washington (83)

OCTOBER
- **10/8** Washington @ Oregon (80)
- **10/15** Stanford @ Notre Dame (83)
- **10/15** USC @ Arizona (82)

NOVEMBER
- **11/12** USC @ Washington (89)
- **11/19** USC @ UCLA (87)
- **11/26** Notre Dame @ USC (86)

*Matchup quality (0-100 scale) rates games based on team strength (FPI) and how close the contest is expected to be.

STEPHEN DUNN/GETTY IMAGES

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

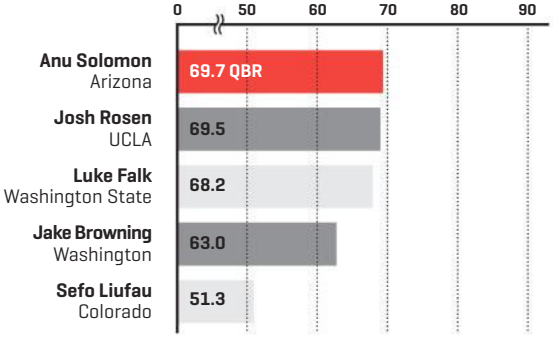
Pac-12 teams have three of the 10 toughest slates, including USC at No. 1.

22

AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

Despite a bit of a sophomore slump, Solomon still sets the pace for Pac-12 QBs, but there's not much of a gap.



Josh Rosen

Rosen, the first UCLA freshman to open a season as the starting QB, set a school record with 245 straight passes without an interception.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Washington

COACH Chris Petersen (3rd season)
15–12 (1–1 in bowl games)

Is this the year the Huskies leap Oregon and Stanford for the Pac-12 title? Last season, with true freshmen at quarterback, running back and left tackle, UW lost six games by an average of just 8.8 points. The youth movement should pay off with 16 starters back, including seven from the Pac-12's best defense, which gave up 4.9 yards per play and 18.8 ppg. —Chantel Jennings

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (4–5)
BOWL GAME Zaxby's Heart of Dallas Bowl vs. Southern Mississippi, 44-31 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Jake Browning: 2,955 yards**
RUSHING **Myles Gaskin: 1,302 yards**
RECEIVING Jaydon Mickens: 692 yards
TACKLES **Azeem Victor: 95**
SACKS Travis Feeney: 8
INTERCEPTIONS **Sidney Jones: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON FS Budda Baker
The numbers show that Baker has started every game but one the past two seasons, made 111 career tackles and grabbed three interceptions. But his stats don't tell the whole story. After an impressive freshman season (75 tackles, one interception, two forced fumbles), offensive coordinators learned to avoid him. As a result, teammates accounted for more picks: Sidney Jones and Kevin King combined for seven last year, up from three in 2014. The secondary's returning depth (only one player, Brian Clay, is gone from last year's two-deep) will make it tough for QBs to simply avoid Baker.

X-FACTOR LT Trey Adams
A 6-foot-8, 306-pound sophomore, Adams is tasked with protecting QB Jake Browning's blind side a year after the Huskies gave up 33 sacks (seventh in the Pac-12). But the line should be more formidable, as Adams, who started nine games before missing the final two with a shoulder injury, is joined by four other returning starters on the line.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
Browning loses three of his four top pass catchers, including Jaydon Mickens (58 receptions, 692 yards, two touchdowns) and tight end Joshua Perkins (36-539-3). Dante Pettis (30 catches) and Brayden Lenius, a tough matchup at 6-5, 228 pounds, should be bigger contributors. The return of John Ross, who was out last season with a knee injury, also helps. He had 371 yards and four TDs in 2014.

THE PRESSER

RB Myles Gaskin rushed for 1,302 yards, becoming Washington's first true freshman with more than 1,000 rushing yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY HE'S SO HARD TO STOP?** "He's just great in short areas and quick as a frickin' hiccup. His feet are unbelievable. His ability to make people miss is special. I'm just thinking of some plays against him and I'm like, 'How in the heck did he get out of that?' He's so fast and decisive and powerful." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Browning became the first true freshman QB to start for Petersen in his 10-year career. By the end of the season he was very steady. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY YOU BELIEVE HE'LL CONTINUE THAT GROWTH?** "You saw his improvement over the course of the year. Young guys get better, but not every young guy gets better over the course of his first year like he did. A lot of times it's Year 1 to Year 2, maybe, but you saw marked improvement. He does really well in their system." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Baker's versatility when roaming a Huskies defense that forced 27 turnovers last season (tied for 13th nationally) is a nightmare for offenses. Baker was named to the All-Pac-12 first team. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT MAKES HIM SO DANGEROUS?** "He can do it all. He's very athletic, instinctive and physical, which are the three biggest things that make a DB great. He's relentless running to the ball. He tries to get every ball every play, and he has a feel for where the ball is going." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Jake Browning**	So.	6-2	205	●
RB	**Myles Gaskin**	So.	5-10	193	●
WR	**Dante Pettis**	Jr.	6-1	187	●
WR	**John Ross**	Jr.	5-11	196	
TE	**Darrell Daniels**	Sr.	6-4	237	●
TE	**Drew Sample**	So.	6-5	260	
C	**Coleman Shelton**	Jr.	6-4	292	●
RG	**Jesse Sosebee**	So.	6-5	314	
LG	**Jake Eldrenkamp**	Sr.	6-5	284	●
RT	**Kaleb McGary**	So.	6-7	300	●
LT	**Trey Adams**	So.	6-8	306	●
K	**Cameron Van Winkle**	Sr.	5-10	189	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Jaylen Johnson**	So.	6-3	285	
NT	**Greg Gaines**	So.	6-2	318	
DT	**Elijah Qualls**	Jr.	6-1	321	●
OLB	**Joe Mathis**	Sr.	6-2	256	●
WLB	**Keishawn Bierria**	Jr.	6-1	226	●
MLB	**Azeem Victor**	Jr.	6-3	227	●
NB	**Darren Gardenhire**	Jr.	5-11	187	●
CB	**Kevin King**	Sr.	6-3	190	
CB	**Sidney Jones**	Jr.	6-0	180	●
SS	**JoJo McIntosh**	So.	6-1	208	
FS	**Budda Baker**	Jr.	5-10	184	●
P	**Van Soderberg**	Fr.	5-11	199	

5

Baker had five pass breakups on throws of 15 or more yards, tied for third in the Pac-12.

CHRISTOPHER MAST/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 9.2 ● FPI CHANCE WASHINGTON WINS

9/3 vs. Rutgers **93%** ● **9/10** vs. Idaho **98%** ● **9/17** vs. Portland State **99%**
9/24 @ Arizona **57%** ● **9/30** vs. Stanford **64%** ● **10/8** @ Oregon **57%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** vs. Oregon State **93%** ● **10/29** @ Utah **63%** ● **11/5** @ California **72%**
11/12 vs. USC **52%** ● **11/19** vs. Arizona State **85%** ● **11/25** @ Washington State **68%**

2 Stanford

COACH David Shaw (6th season)
54–14 (3–2 in bowl games)

The Cardinal bookended 2015 with a lethargic Big Ten loss (Northwestern) and an emphatic Big Ten victory (Iowa) en route to a No. 3 finish in the polls. In 2016, Stanford should again be in the mix for a Pac-12 crown and a national title. Yes, it lost a fixture at QB and a few key faces on defense—but it still holds the ultimate trump card. Looking at you, Christian McCaffrey. —C.J.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12–2 (8–1)
BOWL GAME Rose Bowl Game Presented by Northwestern Mutual vs. Iowa, 45-16 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Kevin Hogan: 2,867 yards
RUSHING **Christian McCaffrey: 2,019 yards**
RECEIVING **Christian McCaffrey: 645 yards**
TACKLES Blake Martinez: 141
SACKS Brennan Scarlett: 5½
INTERCEPTIONS **Quenton Meeks: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Christian McCaffrey
The do-it-all 2015 Heisman runner-up returns to Stanford ... and no one is happy to see him again except his own team. McCaffrey set the NCAA single-season record for all-purpose yards (3,864) and was the only FBS player to lead his team in rushing *and* receiving last year. The junior is also a dangerous return man—he brought back a punt and a kickoff for TDs last year. McCaffrey eludes defenders on the ground, with 47 percent of his rushes going for 5-plus yards in 2015, the best rate of any top-10 back. With upheaval elsewhere (QB, WR), expect David Shaw to call his number even more.

X-FACTOR The offensive line
The Cardinal often reload, rather than rebuild, in the trenches. But they're looking for a new left tackle, left guard and center, so there has to be some worry that a line that gave up only 20 sacks in 2015 (No. 3 in the Pac-12) and paved the way for 223.7 rush ypg (No. 2) might take its lumps, at least early on. McCaffrey is likely capable of masking that inexperience. But asking a new, unproven quarterback to do the same might prove dicey.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Four-year starter Kevin Hogan didn't cede a lot of playing time (951 of 1,010 pass attempts since '13), so potential replacements Keller Chryst and Ryan Burns are still unknowns. They have similar frames and measurables—at 6-foot-5, they're both a hair taller than Hogan—and similar inexperience, with four and six career game appearances, respectively.

THE PRESSER

The Cardinal's new quarterback has one of the nation's best safety nets in McCaffrey but no go-to weapon at receiver. Stanford's leading WR, Michael Rector, returns, but he fell short of 600 yards last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER McCAFFREY CAN CARRY THE OFFENSE ON HIS OWN?** "Probably. When you watch his film, you think, 'He can't be that good.' And I have a feeling Iowa said, 'He can't be that good.' And then you play him and you realize he is that good. He's the one guy who we designed a coverage for, and we don't design coverages for everybody." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Rather than dip into the transfer pool, Shaw prefers to groom QBs, allowing them to study under a starter for a few years before taking over. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THAT WILL BENEFIT CHRYST AND BURNS IN 2016?** "They're going to know the system, and when that's in place it's easy to put yourself in a situation where you can coach up a kid—especially if he has had the mental reps—to continue being successful." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Although the Cardinal lost two critical players in the secondary, a host of younger DBs gained valuable reps last season, their first year on the field, including Alijah Holder and Quenton Meeks (18 combined starts). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE DEFENSIVE BACKFIELD WILL BE AN ASSET NEXT SEASON?** "They play a lot of guys, probably more than any team in our league. Those guys rotate corners. They'll play like eight or nine DBs, so that develops depth." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Keller Chryst**	So.	6-5	237	
RB	**Christian McCaffrey**	Jr.	6-0	202	●
TE	**Greg Taboada**	Jr.	6-5	250	
WR	**Francis Owusu**	Sr.	6-3	223	
WR	**Michael Rector**	Sr.	6-1	185	●
TE	**Dalton Schultz**	So.	6-6	240	●
C	**Jesse Burkett**	So.	6-4	304	
RG	**Johnny Caspers**	Sr.	6-4	296	●
LG	**Brandon Fanaika**	So.	6-3	318	
RT	**Casey Tucker**	Jr.	6-6	296	●
LT	**David Bright**	Sr.	6-5	301	
K	**Conrad Ukropina**	Sr.	6-1	192	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Luke Kaumatule**	Sr.	6-7	294	
NT	**Harrison Phillips**	So.	6-4	290	
DE	**Solomon Thomas**	So.	6-3	275	●
OLB	**Peter Kalambayi**	Jr.	6-3	245	●
ILB	**Jordan Perez**	So.	6-2	223	
ILB	**Kevin Palma**	Jr.	6-2	250	●
OLB	**Joey Alfieri**	So.	6-3	240	
CB	**Alijah Holder**	So.	6-2	185	●
CB	**Quenton Meeks**	So.	6-2	195	●
SS	**Dallas Lloyd**	Sr.	6-3	213	●
FS	**Zach Hoffpauir**	Sr.	6-0	197	
P	**Alex Robinson**	Jr.	6-0	216	●

300

McCaffrey had six games of 300-plus all-purpose yards, four more than any other player.

THEARON W. HENDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.8 ● FPI CHANCE STANFORD WINS

9/2 vs. Kansas State **87%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** vs. USC **49%** ● **9/24** @ UCLA **42%**
9/30 @ Washington **36%** ● **10/8** vs. Washington State **78%** ● **10/15** @ Notre Dame **33%**
10/22 vs. Colorado **88%** ● **10/29** @ Arizona **50%** ● **11/5** vs. Oregon State **90%**
11/12 @ Oregon **51%** ● **11/19** @ California **70%** ● **11/26** vs. Rice **98%**

3 Oregon

COACH Mark Helfrich (4th season)
33–8 (2–2 in bowl games)

Last year the Ducks went with a high-risk, high-reward FCS transfer at QB (Vernon Adams Jr.), and it worked so well they're doing it again with Dakota Prukop. They have two new coordinators—Matt Lubick on offense and Brady Hoke on defense—but there's talent everywhere. Oregon could return to national prominence if Hoke can patch a defense that gave up 37.5 points per game. —C.J.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (7–2)
BOWL GAME Valero Alamo Bowl vs. TCU, 47-41 L (3OT)
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Vernon Adams Jr.: 2,643 yards
RUSHING **Royce Freeman: 1,836 yards**
RECEIVING Bralon Addison: 804 yards
TACKLES Joe Walker: 87
SACKS DeForest Buckner: 10½
INTERCEPTIONS **Tyree Robinson: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Dakota Prukop
Nick Saban and Jim Harbaugh both courted the graduate transfer from Montana State, who played in a variation of Chip Kelly's offense, giving him a head start on the Oregon system. Prukop excelled in it, throwing for 3,025 yards and 28 touchdowns and rushing for 797 yards and 11 TDs. The Ducks return six of their top seven pass catchers from a season ago, including stud running back Royce Freeman, so Prukop will be surrounded by help. After Adams threw for 2,643 yards and 26 TDs with just 6 INTs in his one season after transferring from Eastern Washington, Oregon has high hopes for Round 2.

X-FACTOR QB coach David Yost
Yost came to Eugene via Washington State, where he coached wide receivers in a very different offense. But he has worked with talented quarterbacks before. At Missouri, Yost coached Brad Smith, Chase Daniel and Blaine Gabbert. He must groom Prukop while simultaneously learning the offense.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive line
Hoke is moving the Ducks from a 3-4 to a 4-3, overhauling a defense that allowed 6 yards per play, ranked 125th against the pass (307 yards per game) and lost a 31-point lead in the Alamo Bowl. Hoke is moving linebackers up and converting offensive linemen in search of a fourth starter, but he's done this before. In 2011, he installed a four-man front at Michigan, and the Wolverines improved from 35.2 points per game in 2010 to 17.4, with sacks rising from 18 to 30.

THE PRESSER

Freeman rushed for 1,836 yards during his sophomore campaign, averaging 6.5 yards per carry. Just 12 percent of his 283 runs last season were stopped behind the line of scrimmage, best among the nation's top 10 backs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY FREEMAN IS SO HARD TO STOP?** "How do you tackle him? I don't know. It's almost impossible to tackle that guy unless you gang-tackle him because he keeps his legs moving. For as big as he is (5-11, 230 pounds), he's such a patient runner. He lets things develop. He's powerful, but he doesn't just say, 'Hey, I'll lower the boom.' He kind of feels his way in and out of traffic." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Prukop has more game experience (22 starts) than any other Oregon QB, but adjusting to coaches is always a wild card. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PRUKOP'S LEARNING CURVE?** "One year in the system is never as good as the third year in the system. Regardless of skill set, regardless of talent level, it's very difficult in a year's time to master an offense." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Oregon has used Charles Nelson on offense (115 yards rushing, 270 receiving), defense (47 tackles, 2 INTs) and special teams (33 kick returns). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY HE'S ABLE TO IMPACT GAMES?** "What separates him from others is just his physical toughness. It's very rare for a receiver or DB, or whatever you call him, to go out and be their best tackler. He can be extremely physical, but then he's also very good with the ball in his hands." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Dakota Prukop**	Sr.	6-2	200	
RB	**Royce Freeman**	Jr.	5-11	230	●
RB	**Taj Griffin**	So.	5-10	175	
WR	**Dwayne Stanford**	Sr.	6-5	205	●
WR	**Darren Carrington**	Jr.	6-2	195	●
TE	**Evan Baylis**	Sr.	6-6	250	●
C	**Jake Hanson**	RFr.	6-5	288	
RG	**Doug Brenner**	Jr.	6-2	305	
LG	**Evan Voeller**	Jr.	6-5	295	
RT	**Cameron Hunt**	Sr.	6-4	295	●
LT	**Tyrell Crosby**	Jr.	6-5	310	●
K	**Aidan Schneider**	Jr.	6-4	235	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Henry Mondeaux**	Jr.	6-5	280	●
DT	**Austin Maloata**	Jr.	6-1	305	
DT	**Canton Kaumatule**	So.	6-7	295	
DE	**Torrodney Prevot**	Sr.	6-3	225	
LB	**Johnny Ragin III**	Sr.	6-3	225	
LB	**A.J. Hotchkins**	Jr.	5-11	230	
LB	**Jimmie Swain**	Jr.	6-3	235	
CB	**Arrion Springs**	Jr.	5-11	205	●
CB	**Tyree Robinson**	Jr.	6-4	205	●
SS	**Reggie Daniels**	Sr.	6-1	205	●
FS	**Juwaan Williams**	Jr.	6-0	195	●
P	**Ian Wheeler**	Jr.	6-0	205	●

Freeman rushed for at least 100 yards in the final nine games, the longest such active streak.

RICK SCUTERI/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● **FPI CHANCE OREGON WINS**

9/3 vs. UC Davis **99%** ● **9/10** vs. Virginia **86%** ● **9/17** @ Nebraska **36%**
9/24 vs. Colorado **83%** ● **10/1** @ Washington State **49%** ● **10/8** vs. Washington **43%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/21** @ California **60%** ● **10/29** vs. Arizona State **77%** ● **11/5** @ USC **20%**
11/12 vs. Stanford **49%** ● **11/19** @ Utah **47%** ● **11/26** @ Oregon State **76%**

4 Washington State

COACH Mike Leach (5th season)
21–29 (1–1 in bowl games)

Mike Leach had a breakthrough in 2015, refueling his revival in Pullman by winning nine games, including huge triumphs over Oregon, Arizona State and UCLA. The offense will again be a force with Luke Falk, who led the nation in passing yards per game, and Gabe Marks, who led the conference in receptions. But Wazzu has also made big defensive strides. —C.J.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (6–3)
BOWL GAME Hyundai Sun Bowl vs. Miami (Fla.), 20-14 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Luke Falk: 4,566 yards**
RUSHING **Gerard Wicks: 610 yards**
RECEIVING **Gabe Marks: 1,192 yards**
TACKLES **Peyton Pelluer: 101**
SACKS **Hercules Mata'afa: 7**
INTERCEPTIONS **Shalom Luani: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Gabe Marks
After leading the conference with eight receptions per game (best in the Power 5), Marks returns for his senior year to wreak havoc on defenses. He caught 104 passes for 1,192 yards and scored 15 touchdowns (fourth in the nation) last season, which set a Washington State record. He has big-play ability—64 percent of his catches went for first downs or touchdowns—and he caught a game-winning TD pass with three seconds left against UCLA. He already owns the WSU school record for career receptions with 227.

X-FACTOR Running backs
The Cougars have the backfield to provide a twist to Leach's air raid attack. Gerard Wicks (107 carries, 610 rushing yards), Jamal Morrow (53-347) and Keith Harrington (37-234) all return, with Wicks providing a big-gain threat: 22 of his carries went for at least 10 yards. Redshirt freshman James Williams has drawn praise from coaches in practice and could also add firepower.

POSITION BATTLE Left tackle
The Cougars averaged 3.6 yards per rush last season, the best rushing rate of Leach's tenure. But now Washington State needs to replace Joe Dahl and his 34 career starts. Andre Dillard (who appeared in two games) and Cody O'Connell (12 games on special teams) will battle for the job, and Leach will be paying close attention. The Cougars allowed 41 sacks, and Falk suffered a concussion against Colorado and missed the Apple Cup at Washington.

THE PRESSER

Falk, a former walk-on, threw for 4,566 yards with 38 TDs and 8 INTs, completing 69.5 percent of his passes and leading the nation with 380.5 ypg. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY FALK IS SO EFFECTIVE?** "He's in a great system where they put a lot of stuff on the quarterback. They give him a lot of decisions at the line of scrimmage. He does a great job of understanding defenses and where to go with the ball. I think he's talented. But the mental aspect—that has made him such a good player." —Pac-12 offensive coach

In Alex Grinch's first year as defensive coordinator, WSU improved from allowing 38.6 ppg in 2014 to just 27.7, and the number of TD passes allowed fell from 33 to 13. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT GRINCH'S BIGGEST CONTRIBUTION IS?** "[They're] similar to Washington, where they made you earn every yard. The biggest difference I noticed is that they did a much better job of not giving up the big play." —Pac-12 offensive coach

Last season the Cougars averaged 80.1 rushing yards per game, which was almost three times what they averaged during Leach's first year in the Pac-12. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY LEACH'S OFFENSE IS SUCH A CHALLENGE?** "There's a lot of answers built into the system and built into each play. When you take one thing away, there's something else that's there, and their quarterback is able to recognize that and go to it. When they go to a second or third choice, the guy makes the play and then he gets some extra yards." —Pac-12 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Luke Falk**	Jr.	6-4	205	●
RB	**Gerard Wicks**	Jr.	6-0	224	●
WR	**Isaiah Johnson**	Fr.	6-3	211	
WR	**Gabe Marks**	Sr.	6-0	190	●
WR	**River Cracraft**	Sr.	6-0	200	●
WR	**Robert Lewis**	Jr.	5-9	170	●
C	**Riley Sorenson**	Sr.	6-4	319	●
RG	**Eduardo Middleton**	Sr.	6-5	310	●
LG	**Cody O'Connell**	Jr.	6-8	346	
RT	**Cole Madison**	Jr.	6-5	303	●
LT	**Andre Dillard**	So.	6-5	270	
K	**Erik Powell**	Jr.	6-1	193	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Hercules Mata'afa**	So.	6-2	242	
DT	**Robert Barber**	Sr.	6-3	307	●
DT	**Garrett McBroom**	Jr.	6-3	276	
OLB	**Logan Tago**	So.	6-3	240	
WLB	**Suliasi Tamaivena**	Jr.	6-2	225	
MLB	**Peyton Pelluer**	Jr.	6-0	227	●
NB	**Parker Henry**	Sr.	5-11	207	●
CB	**Marcellus Pippins**	Jr.	5-10	170	●
CB	**Darrien Molton**	So.	5-10	170	●
SS	**Charleston White**	Jr.	6-0	185	
FS	**Shalom Luani**	Sr.	6-0	201	●
P	**Zach Charme**	So.	6-1	192	●

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.6 ● **FPI CHANCE WASHINGTON STATE WINS**

9/3 vs. Eastern Washington **97%** ● **9/10** @ Boise State **36%** ● **9/17** vs. Idaho **95%**
9/24 BYE ● **10/1** vs. Oregon **51%** ● **10/8** @ Stanford **22%** ● **10/15** vs. UCLA **39%**
10/22 @ Arizona State **47%** ● **10/29** @ Oregon State **66%** ● **11/5** vs. Arizona **52%**
11/12 vs. California **67%** ● **11/19** @ Colorado **57%** ● **11/25** vs. Washington **33%**

3

Falk had three games in which he completed at least 40 passes last year. All other FBS QBs combined for two.

RICH KANE/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

5 California

COACH Sonny Dykes (4th season)
14–23 (1–0 in bowl games)

After winning eight games for the first time since 2009, the Bears begin life without Jared Goff. Coach Sonny Dykes will have new faces all over the offense, among them the coordinator, Jake Spavital, who replaces Tony Franklin. On defense, the Bears have to survive the North's rugged offenses after the transfer of senior linebacker Hardy Nickerson. —C.J.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (4–5)
BOWL GAME Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl vs. Air Force, 55-36 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Jared Goff: 4,719 yards
RUSHING **Khalfani Muhammad: 586 yards**
RECEIVING Bryce Treggs: 956 yards
TACKLES Hardy Nickerson: 112
SACKS Kyle Kragen: 7
INTERCEPTIONS Darius White: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON OC Jake Spavital
The former Texas A&M offensive coordinator has been handed the keys to a potentially potent offense. Last season the Bears threw for 4,892 yards—fifth best nationally—but now they're without the stars who created most of those fireworks. Gone is Jared Goff (529 pass attempts, 4,719 passing yards, 43 passing TDs), as are the top six receivers, all of whom accounted for at least 40 catches and 450 receiving yards apiece last year. Chad Hansen is the unit's top returning receiver, but he accounted for just 19 catches and one touchdown in 2015.

X-FACTOR The running game
Cal has never averaged more than 153 rushing ypg under Dykes, which leaves it in the bottom half of the Pac-12 rankings. But with the likes of Tre Watson (45.8 ypg in 2015), Khalfani Muhammad (48.8 ypg) and Vic Enwere (38.8 ypg), the Bears could push toward the middle of the Pac-12.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Goff started all 37 games from 2013 to '15, setting 26 school records, including career marks of 12,220 yards and 96 TDs. Chase Forrest, who redshirted in 2014 and went 10-of-18 for 162 yards, a TD and an INT in three games as Goff's backup, has Dykes' trust. But the 6-foot-2, 205-pound passer will be pushed by Luke Rubenzer and Ross Bowers, who both pose a running threat. A wild card: Graduate transfer Zach Kline, who left Cal two years ago after losing the job to Goff, returns for another shot at the job.

THE PRESSER

The loss of Goff, Cal's best offensive player since Marshawn Lynch, could foreshadow a down year for Cal. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THIS IS A REBUILDING YEAR?** "Tough to say. I'd love to say yes—sign me up for that. But they're good at what they do. They have their scheme. So they're a little bit of an unknown. I assume they have another first-round draft pick at quarterback, NFL-level receivers. But I hope it's a rebuilding year." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Rubenzer has played on offense and defense for the Bears. Last season he was used as a safety and recorded 43 tackles and two interceptions. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF HAVING A VERSATILE PLAYER?** "In high school, the key guy is usually the running back or the quarterback. Those guys could've played a lot of positions if [they weren't] preoccupied with playing quarterback. I think there's an awareness there that's beneficial." —Pac-12 head coach

Cal will face the top four returning running backs in the Pac-12 North, including Stanford's Christian McCaffrey (144 ypg), Oregon's Royce Freeman (141 ypg) and Washington's Myles Gaskin (100 ypg). The transfer of MLB Hardy Nickerson, who had a team-high 112 tackles, leaves a big hole after he decided to play for his dad, the new DC at Illinois. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW MUCH NICKERSON WILL BE MISSED?** "We accounted for him because they did a whole bunch of things with him. They moved him around a lot, and his athleticism created problems." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Chase Forrest**	So.	6-2	205	
RB	**Tre Watson**	Jr.	5-10	190	●
WR	**Vic Wharton III**	So.	6-0	200	
WR	**Raymond Hudson**	Jr.	6-3	230	
WR	**Melquise Stovall**	Fr.	5-9	185	
WR	**Carlos Strickland**	RFr.	6-4	215	
C	**Dominic Granado**	Sr.	6-4	290	●
RG	**Dwayne Wallace**	Jr.	6-5	340	
LG	**Chris Borrayo**	Sr.	6-3	310	●
RT	**Steven Moore**	Sr.	6-6	305	●
LT	**Aaron Cochran**	Jr.	6-8	350	
K	**Matt Anderson**	Jr.	6-0	190	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Noah Westerfield**	Jr.	6-3	250	
DT	**James Looney**	Jr.	6-3	275	●
DT	**Tony Mekari**	Jr.	6-1	280	
DE	**DeVante Wilson**	Sr.	6-5	265	●
WLB	**Aisea Tongilava**	So.	6-0	225	
MLB	**Devante Downs**	Jr.	6-3	240	
NB	**Cameron Walker**	Sr.	5-10	180	●
CB	**Antoine Albert**	Sr.	6-1	185	
CB	**Darius Allensworth**	Jr.	6-0	190	●
SS	**Damariay Drew**	Sr.	5-11	200	●
FS	**Evan Rambo**	So.	6-3	205	
P	**Dylan Klumph**	So.	6-3	230	

71

Watson ran for just 504 yards, but 359 of them (71 percent) came in his last four games.

JEFF CHIU/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.1 ● FPI CHANCE CALIFORNIA WINS

8/27 vs. Hawaii (Sydney, Australia) **87%** ● **9/3** BYE ● **9/10** @ San Diego State **56%**
9/17 vs. Texas **44%** ● **9/24** @ Arizona State **40%** ● **10/1** vs. Utah **47%** ● **10/8** @ Oregon State **58%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/21** vs. Oregon **40%** ● **10/27** @ USC **10%** ● **11/5** vs. Washington **28%**
11/12 @ Washington State **34%** ● **11/19** vs. Stanford **30%** ● **11/26** vs. UCLA **31%**

6 Oregon State

COACH Gary Andersen (2nd season)
2–10 (0–0 in bowl games)

After the team finished 2-10 in Gary Andersen's debut, going winless in conference play, Oregon State fans are hard-pressed to find silver linings. There's a ray of hope from the final game: The Beavers outscored Oregon 35-21 in the second half of a 52-42 loss. Otherwise, all that's left is Andersen's reputation as a program builder to provide hope for a turnaround in Corvallis. —C.J.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2–10 (0–9 Pac-12)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Seth Collins: 935 yards
RUSHING Seth Collins: 575 yards
RECEIVING **Jordan Villamin: 660 yards**
TACKLES Rommel Mageo: 87
SACKS **Jonathan Willis: 2**
INTERCEPTIONS Rommel Mageo: 2

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Darell Garretson
Garretson sat out last year at Oregon State after transferring from Utah State, where he made 11 starts for the Aggies in 2013 and 2014. He threw for 2,586 yards, 18 TDs and 10 INTs filling in for injured starter Chuckie Keeton. Last season, on the Beavers' scout team, he imitated the tendencies of other Pac-12 QBs, which he says helped his game.

X-FACTOR Defensive line
The Beavers recorded just 17 sacks last season (Pac-12 leader Arizona State tallied 46), and no player registered more than two. OSU will likely face several first-year quarterbacks this year (against Colorado, California, Utah, Stanford and Oregon), so getting a pass rush could be a tipping point. Andersen took over D-line coaching duties, hoping to mold Titus Failauga (29 tackles, one sack), Sumner Houston (21 tackles) and Baker Pritchard (30 tackles, 1½ sacks) into a group that can get after QBs.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Andersen's best offenses feature a star in the backfield (like Robert Turbin at Utah State and Melvin Gordon at Wisconsin), and that was missing last year as OSU ranked 10th in the league in rushing attempts. Oregon State loses three of its top five rushers: QB Seth Collins transferred, RB Storm Woods graduated and Paul Lucas moved to WR. Ryan Nall surprised in the second half of the season, rushing for two 100-yard games, including 174 yards against Oregon. Damien Haskins and juco transfer Tim Cook will also be names to watch.

THE PRESSER

Andersen, who played center at Utah, has a reputation for building teams that are tough. Oregon State was far from it last fall, but other coaches think he can do it again. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THIS PROGRAM IN 2016?** "We played them [at a previous stop]. I have a lot of respect for what he's capable of doing. There's no doubt he has a plan in place. Unfortunately, they're going to get better. I wish they weren't." —Pac-12 defensive coach

Nall's nickname by the end of the season was Wrecking Nall: The 6-foot-2, 235-pound sophomore averaged 6.2 yards per carry on 73 attempts. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NALL'S EMERGENCE?** "He kept getting better throughout the year. We struggled to contain him and tackle him. He showed speed against us, and there was one run when he ran away from guys in our secondary, which is not good. I think that kid got a lot more confidence as the year went on." —Pac-12 offensive coach

Garretson was 8–3 as a starter in a very similar scheme at Utah State before rejoining former Aggies OC Kevin McGiven in Corvallis. Now he has a year in the program under his belt. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW GARRETSON COULD HELP OREGON STATE?** "The biggest thing is that there's no substitute for experience, and that makes a huge difference. Guys that have playing experience, the game slows down for them, and I think it makes a huge difference for what the Beavers will do with their offense." —Pac-12 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Darell Garretson**	Jr.	6-0	208
RB	**Ryan Nall**	So.	6-2	230
WR	**Hunter Jarmon**	Jr.	5-11	193 ●
WR	**Victor Bolden**	Sr.	5-9	181 ●
WR	**Jordan Villamin**	Jr.	6-5	232 ●
TE	**Caleb Smith**	Sr.	6-6	266 ●
C	**Leo Fuimaono**	Jr.	6-2	300
RG	**Gavin Andrews**	Sr.	6-6	332
LG	**Fred Lauina**	Jr.	6-4	310 ●
RT	**Dustin Stanton**	Sr.	6-6	304 ●
LT	**Sean Harlow**	Sr.	6-4	298 ●
K	**Garrett Owens**	Jr.	5-9	181 ●
DEFENSE				
DE	**Sumner Houston**	So.	6-2	290
NT	**Kalani Vakameilalo**	So.	6-3	314
DE	**Baker Pritchard**	Jr.	6-3	272 ●
OLB	**Titus Failauga**	Jr.	6-3	248 ●
MLB	**Caleb Saulo**	Sr.	6-1	236 ●
WLB	**Manase Hungalu**	Jr.	6-1	237
NB	**Bright Ugwoegbu**	So.	6-2	226 ●
CB	**Treston Decoud**	Sr.	6-3	210 ●
CB	**Dwayne Williams**	So.	5-9	180
SS	**Devin Chappell**	Sr.	6-2	204 ●
FS	**Brandon Arnold**	Jr.	5-11	202
P	**Nick Porebski**	Jr.	5-10	198 ●

118

The 5-foot-9, 181-pound Bolden caught 118 passes in the past two seasons.

YOUNG KWAK/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.8 ● **FPI CHANCE OREGON STATE WINS**

9/1 @ Minnesota **34%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** vs. Idaho State **99%**
9/24 vs. Boise State **26%** ● **10/1** @ Colorado **32%** ● **10/8** vs. California **42%**
10/15 vs. Utah **32%** ● **10/22** @ Washington **7%** ● **10/29** vs. Washington State **34%**
11/5 @ Stanford **10%** ● **11/12** @ UCLA **9%** ● **11/19** vs. Arizona **29%** ● **11/26** vs. Oregon **24%**

1 USC

COACH Clay Helton (2nd season)
5–4 (0–1 in bowl games)

After another turbulent year and another coaching change, Clay Helton begins his first full season as the Trojans' coach. He debuts with a brutal schedule, a new quarterback and a completely rebuilt defensive front. But he's not without options. The Trojans have some of the best skill players in the country and an offensive line with every starter returning. —Kevin Gemmell

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–6 (6–3)
BOWL GAME National Funding Holiday Bowl vs. Wisconsin, 23-21 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Cody Kessler: 3,536 yards
RUSHING **Ronald Jones II: 987 yards**
RECEIVING **JuJu Smith-Schuster: 1,454 yards**
TACKLES Su'a Cravens: 86
SACKS **Porter Gustin: 5½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Cameron Smith: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Juju Smith-Schuster
Whoever wins the quarterback job will become fast friends with Smith-Schuster. After posting 89 catches for 1,454 yards and 10 touchdowns last season, Smith-Schuster will enter 2016 as a favorite for the Biletnikoff Award. How much room is there for improvement? Consider that he was held under 100 yards receiving in each of USC's final five games, including losses to Oregon, Stanford and Wisconsin.

X-FACTOR DL Rasheem Green
The Trojans are in complete rebuilding mode on the defensive front, and things got worse when projected starter Kenny Bigelow was lost in the spring with a torn ACL—his second in three years. Green leads a talented group of sophomores: He was solid off the bench as a freshman, with nine tackles combined against Oregon and Stanford. Noah Jefferson played in every game and started in the Holiday Bowl, and Jacob Daniel and Malik Dorton also made appearances, albeit brief ones. It's a group that's thin on depth and experience.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
The quarterback spot at USC is one of the most glamorous in college football. Max Browne, a 6-foot-5, 220-pound junior, has waited behind Cody Kessler for two years, throwing just 19 passes, completing 11 of them for 143 yards. But redshirt freshman Sam Darnold impressed on the scout team and will push him. The winner of the derby gets the keys to an offense loaded with talent—and one on a crash course with the Tide defense.

THE PRESSER

Coaches always reference USC's blue-chippers and how the program annually leads the Pac-12 in recruiting. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT USC'S TALENT LEVEL?** "They have a lot of lead singers but not a lot of bass players. Bass players, they keep the whole thing together while the lead guitarist and lead singer do their things. I don't know how many bass players they have. But I know they have a lot of guys who want the mic and the guitar solos." —Pac-12 offensive coach

The opener against Alabama poses a test for Helton, who lost his first two games as "official" head coach (to Stanford in the Pac-12 championship game and against Wisconsin in the Holiday Bowl). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW BIG THE OPENER IS?** "They are getting Alabama at a really bad time for [USC's] program. It's Clay's first season opener as a head coach. They don't know who the quarterback is going to be. If they were a team loaded for a national championship run, then I'd say it's extremely important. But I don't think they are." —Pac-12 offensive coach

Despite lofty expectations, USC has just one 10-win season in the past four years. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT A PERCEPTION OF USC AS UNDERACHIEVER?** "When you look at what those kids have had to go through, it's almost miraculous that they have been able to stay above .500. But at the same time, you look at that roster and all of the talent and athleticism and you have to ask: What's going wrong? What's missing? And I don't know what the answer is." —Pac-12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Max Browne**	Jr.	6-5	220	
RB	**Ronald Jones**	So.	6-0	185	●
WR	**Steven Mitchell Jr.**	Jr.	5-10	190	●
WR	**Darreus Rogers**	Sr.	6-1	215	●
WR	**JuJu Smith-Schuster**	Jr.	6-2	215	●
TE	**Taylor McNamara**	Sr.	6-5	245	●
C	**Toa Lobendahn**	Jr.	6-3	290	●
RG	**Viane Talamaivao**	Jr.	6-2	320	●
LG	**Damien Mama**	Jr.	6-4	327	●
RT	**Zach Banner**	Sr.	6-9	350	●
LT	**Chad Wheeler**	Sr.	6-6	300	●
K	**Matt Boermeester**	Jr.	6-0	180	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Malik Dorton**	So.	6-2	275	
DT	**Rasheem Green**	So.	6-5	265	
DT	**Noah Jefferson**	So.	6-8	330	
OLB	**Porter Gustin**	So.	6-5	250	
ILB	**Cameron Smith**	So.	6-2	245	●
ILB	**Osa Masina**	So.	6-4	245	
OLB	**Uchenna Nwosu**	Jr.	6-3	210	
CB	**Adoree' Jackson**	Jr.	5-11	185	●
CB	**Iman Marshall**	So.	6-2	200	●
SS	**Chris Hawkins**	Jr.	5-11	195	●
FS	**Marvell Tell III**	So.	6-2	195	●
P	**Chris Tilbey**	So.	6-5	220	

6

Smith-Schuster led the Pac-12 with six TDs on throws that traveled at least 20 yards.

KELVIN KUO/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.8 ● **FPI CHANCE USC WINS**

9/3 vs. Alabama (Arlington, Texas) **38%** ● **9/10** vs. Utah State **95%** ● **9/17** @ Stanford **51%**
9/23 @ Utah **70%** ● **10/1** vs. Arizona State **89%** ● **10/8** vs. Colorado **92%**
10/15 @ Arizona **67%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/27** vs. California **90%** ● **11/5** vs. Oregon **80%**
11/12 @ Washington **48%** ● **11/19** @ UCLA **56%** ● **11/26** vs. Notre Dame **71%**

2 UCLA

COACH Jim Mora (5th season)
37–16 (2–2 in bowl games)

UCLA's hopes for a conference title fell well short after key injuries on defense led to an eight-win season. Talented sophomore quarterback Josh Rosen lived up to his five-star billing, but his top receivers and 1,300-yard rusher, Paul Perkins, have to be replaced. Another change: Offensive coordinator Kennedy Polamalu steps in for the departed Noel Mazzone. —K.G.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (5–4)
BOWL GAME Foster Farms Bowl vs. Nebraska, 37–29 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Josh Rosen: 3,670 yards**
RUSHING Paul Perkins: 1,343 yards
RECEIVING Jordan Payton: 1,106 yards
TACKLES **Jayon Brown: 93**
SACKS Aaron Wallace: 7
INTERCEPTIONS **Ishmael Adams: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Josh Rosen
The Bruins went all-in with the 6-foot-4, 210-pound prize recruit as a true freshman last season, and he lived up to the "Chosen Rosen" hype in his first start. Against Virginia, he completed 28 of 35 passes for 351 yards, three TDs and no interceptions. But two games later, he showed his inexperience with three first-half picks and a total of 106 passing yards against BYU. Rosen completed 60 percent of his passes and averaged 282.3 yards per game, and he threw 23 touchdowns with just 11 interceptions. Still, seven of those picks came in the Bruins' five losses, including two in a 40-21 drubbing against USC.

X-FACTOR DL Eddie Vanderdoes
Vanderdoes, a junior, was one of the Pac-12's best defenders before suffering a knee injury in the opener after he'd already recorded eight tackles, two for a loss, against Virginia. Without Vanderdoes, as well as LB Myles Jack (knee) and CB Fabian Moreau (foot), all of whom were lost for the season, the UCLA defense allowed nearly 200 rushing yards per game. The return of the 6-3, 305-pound Vanderdoes (50 tackles, 5½ TFLs in 2014) will help fix that.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
The Bruins lost four of their top five pass catchers, and although Darren Andrews (42 catches, 429 yards), Eldridge Massington (11 for 120) and Kenneth Walker III (9 for 231) have experience, they combined for just two TD receptions last season. ESPN 300 recruit Theo Howard, who enrolled early, leads a group of four-star recruits who could work into the mix.

THE PRESSER

No one is questioning Rosen's talent, but some have asked whether the QB has matured. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ROSEN?** "On the field, he's one of the best talents I've seen in a while. Incredible head for the game. But you also hear stories about him. That he's too cocky or that he's not coachable. Sometimes overconfidence gets misconstrued as cocky. I just know that a lot of people have said he's the same kid he was in high school and hasn't grown up yet." —Pac-12 offensive coach

Hopes were high for UCLA in 2015, with dreams of a Pac-12 title and a run at the playoff. But injuries, especially to defenders such as Jack, took a huge toll. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT WORRIES YOU REGARDING UCLA?** "Their unpredictability. That could be a 10- or 11-win team, or they could be a six-win team. You never have a sense of what you're going to get out of them until kickoff." —Pac-12 defensive coach

The Bruins were in the top half of the league in scoring in three of the four years Mazzone was offensive coordinator. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT CHANGES TO EXPECT ON OFFENSE?** "To be honest, I'm still getting used to seeing Kennedy Polamalu wearing blue instead of red. [He was a longtime USC assistant who was hired to coach UCLA's running backs and then promoted to offensive coordinator.] I think of him and I think USC. I think what they run now fits the quarterback. Swing pass, run. Swing pass, run. Run, deep ball. I don't think it's going to be radically different." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Josh Rosen**	So.	6-4	210	●
RB	**Soso Jamabo**	So.	6-3	210	
WR	**Ishmael Adams**	Sr.	5-8	180	●
WR	**Kenneth Walker III**	Sr.	5-10	180	
WR	**Eldridge Massington**	Jr.	6-2	210	
TE	**Nate Iese**	Sr.	6-3	250	
C	**Scott Quessenberry**	Jr.	6-4	295	
RG	**Kenny Lacy**	Jr.	6-4	285	●
LG	**Jake Raulerson**	Jr.	6-4	295	
RT	**Kolton Miller**	So.	6-9	295	
LT	**Conor McDermott**	Sr.	6-9	310	●
K	**JJ Molson**	Fr.	6-0	190	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Matt Dickerson**	Jr.	6-4	275	●
DT	**Eli Ankou**	Sr.	6-3	305	●
DT	**Eddie Vanderdoes**	Jr.	6-3	305	
DE	**Takkarist McKinley**	Sr.	6-2	258	●
ILB	**Kenny Young**	Jr.	6-1	235	●
ILB	**Jayon Brown**	Sr.	5-11	220	●
OLB	**Cameron Judge**	Sr.	6-1	230	
CB	**Fabian Moreau**	Sr.	6-0	200	●
CB	**Marcus Rios**	Sr.	5-11	195	●
SS	**Randall Goforth**	Sr.	5-10	190	●
FS	**Jaleel Wadood**	Jr.	5-10	175	●
P	**Austin Kent**	Fr.	6-2	210	

3

Rosen's 3 percent sack rate was best in the Pac-12 and half the FBS average.

CHRIS WILLIAMS/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.2 ● **FPI CHANCE UCLA WINS**

9/3 @ Texas A&M **34%** ● **9/10** vs. UNLV **97%** ● **9/17** @ BYU **67%**
9/24 vs. Stanford **58%** ● **10/1** vs. Arizona **70%** ● **10/8** @ Arizona State **68%**
10/15 @ Washington State **61%** ● **10/22** vs. Utah **74%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/3** @ Colorado **75%**
11/12 vs. Oregon State **91%** ● **11/19** vs. USC **44%** ● **11/26** @ California **69%**

3 Arizona

COACH Rich Rodriguez (5th season)
33–20 (3–1 in bowl games)

Rich Rodriguez returns for his fifth season—despite seemingly being mentioned for every coaching vacancy this offseason—with an experienced offensive backfield and a desire to chase the aftertaste of a 7-6 mark. He overhauled the defensive staff, reworking a unit that gave up nearly 36 points per game, in hopes of a return to 2014 glory, when Arizona won the South. —K.G.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (3–6)
BOWL GAME Gildan New Mexico Bowl vs. New Mexico, 45-37 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Anu Solomon: 2,667 yards**
RUSHING Jared Baker: 798 yards
RECEIVING Cayleb Jones: 904 yards
TACKLES Will Parks: 76
SACKS Reggie Gilbert: 3½
INTERCEPTIONS Jamar Allah: 3

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Anu Solomon
Solomon had an extremely successful redshirt freshman campaign in 2014, when he led the Wildcats to the Fiesta Bowl while throwing for 3,793 yards and 28 touchdowns with just nine interceptions. But he struggled as a sophomore (20 TDs, 2,667 passing yards), suffering through a particularly rough outing in a 49-3 loss to Washington, when he went 18-of-31 for 160 yards and two interceptions. His health bears watching after he suffered two concussions last season and missed games against Stanford on Oct. 3 and Arizona State on Nov. 21.

X-FACTOR RB Nick Wilson
When healthy, Wilson is one of the conference's most dynamic players. Like Solomon, the junior had a spectacular debut in 2014, rushing for 1,375 yards and 16 touchdowns. But also like Solomon, health is a concern—knee and foot injuries limited him last season to 725 yards (559 in the first four games). He gives the Wildcats a score-from-anywhere threat: Three times in 2014 he scored on touchdown runs of 72 yards or more.

POSITION BATTLE Center
Finding the right anchor for the offensive line would obviously help ease concerns about the health of Wilson and Solomon; the Cats averaged 3.5 sacks surrendered in losses, compared with 1.4 in wins. Senior Zach Hemmila (6-3, 310 pounds) and sophomore Levi Walton (6-3, 290) both subbed in at center in 2015, but keep an eye on redshirt freshman Nathan Eldridge (6-3, 286), a scout-team star last year.

THE PRESSER

Solomon did not progress as much as some predicted, following up his 59.8 Total QBR as a redshirt freshman with a 69.7. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OUTLOOK FOR SOLOMON?** "I'm not sure if you want to call it a sophomore slump, but he wasn't the same player last year as he was in 2014. I don't know if it was the guys around him or their schedule. He's good enough, and that offense is good enough, that he can be really productive if he bounces back." —Pac-12 offensive coach

The Wildcats had one of the league's leakiest D's in 2015, ranking 114th in yards allowed per game. The linebacker corps had a lot of injuries, including to all-everything star Scooby Wright III. The defensive coaching staff took the fall, and Rodriguez replaced DC Jeff Casteel with Marcel Yates from Boise State. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YATES?** "I think Jeff was in a bad spot with all of the injuries they had. I know Boise State did a lot of base nickel stuff, which fits in with what Arizona was doing before. From a scheme standpoint, I don't think there will be a huge overhaul." —Pac-12 offensive coach

Four different teams have won the South the past four years, including Arizona in 2014. It could be up for grabs again. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER ARIZONA CAN WIN THE SOUTH?** "I wouldn't count RichRod out. He kept the team together last season with that schedule and those injuries, and they still went to a bowl game." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Anu Solomon**	Jr.	6-2	215	●
RB	**Nick Wilson**	Jr.	5-10	215	●
WR	**Samajie Grant**	Sr.	5-9	180	●
WR	**Trey Griffey**	Sr.	6-3	209	
WR	**Nate Phillips**	Sr.	5-7	180	●
WR	**Cam Denson**	Jr.	5-11	179	
C	**Zach Hemmila**	Sr.	6-3	310	
RG	**Jacob Alsadek**	Jr.	6-7	318	●
LG	**Freddie Tagaloa**	Sr.	6-8	320	●
RT	**Gerhard de Beer**	Jr.	6-7	311	
LT	**Layth Friekh**	Jr.	6-5	282	●
K	**Josh Pollack**	So.	5-10	184	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Luca Bruno**	Jr.	6-4	300	●
NT	**Parker Zellers**	Jr.	6-1	255	
DT	**Sani Fuimaono**	Sr.	6-1	294	
LB	**DeAndre' Miller**	Jr.	6-3	236	●
LB	**Michael Barton**	Sr.	6-0	240	●
LB	**Paul Magloire Jr.**	Sr.	6-1	221	●
NB	**Demetrius Flannigan-Fowles**	So.	6-2	199	
CB	**Dane Cruikshank**	Jr.	6-1	204	
CB	**DaVonte' Neal**	Sr.	5-10	178	●
SS	**Tellas Jones**	Sr.	6-0	199	●
FS	**Anthony Mariscal**	RFr.	5-10	194	
P	**Josh Pollack**	So.	5-10	184	

13

Wilson had 13 TDs on zone-read rushes in the past two seasons, second in the Power 5 to Ezekiel Elliott (23).

CASEY SAPIO/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● FPI CHANCE ARIZONA WINS

9/3 vs. BYU (Glendale, Ariz.) **64%** ● **9/10** vs. Grambling State **99%** ● **9/17** vs. Hawaii **97%**
9/24 vs. Washington **43%** ● **10/1** @ UCLA **30%** ● **10/8** @ Utah **45%**
10/15 vs. USC **33%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Stanford **51%** ● **11/5** @ Washington State **48%**
11/12 vs. Colorado **79%** ● **11/19** @ Oregon State **71%** ● **11/25** vs. Arizona State **72%**

4 Utah

COACH Kyle Whittingham (12th season)
94–46 (8–1 in bowl games)

The Utes have been on the rise since joining the Pac-12 in 2011, peaking last fall with four weeks in the top 10 and a 10–3 record. Now they look to cut down on conference losses, relying on a D that yielded 22.3 ppg and returns one of the nation's top linemen, Lowell Lotulelei. And if Washington transfer Troy Williams can ease the loss of QB Travis Wilson, Utah might climb even higher. —K.G.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (6–3)
BOWL GAME Royal Purple Las Vegas Bowl vs. BYU, 35-28 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Travis Wilson: 2,095 yards
RUSHING Devontae Booker: 1,261 yards
RECEIVING Britain Covey: 519 yards
TACKLES Gionni Paul: 108
SACKS **Kylie Fitts: 7**
INTERCEPTIONS **Marcus Williams: 5**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DT Lowell Lotulelei
While there are multiple offensive gaps, coach Kyle Whittingham's top priority is an airtight defense. That makes the 6-foot-2, 310-pound Lotulelei perhaps his most important player. A junior with 18 career starts, Lotulelei was first-team All-Pac-12 last season, and his forced fumble against BYU in the Las Vegas Bowl led to a game-winning touchdown for the Utes. He's a run stopper, he can rush the passer and he can take on double-teams. It's not the sexiest position on the field, but what he gives the Utah defense is invaluable.

X-FACTOR RB Joe Williams
With the lack of an explosive passing attack, the Utes leaned heavily on senior running back Devontae Booker (2,773 yards, 21 touchdowns over the past two seasons). Williams, who carried 104 times for 477 yards last year, is expected to step in. After Booker injured a knee last November, Williams made the most of his chance in Utah's final three games, gaining 399 yards on 85 carries with three scores, including two against in-state rival BYU.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Troy Williams, a 6-2, 200-pound transfer from Washington via junior college, is the favorite to replace Wilson. Recruited by Steve Sarkisian, he appeared in just five games after the arrival of Chris Petersen. Williams transferred to Santa Monica College, where he threw 31 TDs and rushed for seven last season. He'll battle junior Brandon Cox and freshman Tyler Huntley, an early enrollee who has earned praise for his athleticism.

THE PRESSER

The Utes won a lot of games with Wilson, but he threw just 54 career TDs against 37 INTs. There's hope that a new QB can open up the offense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TROY WILLIAMS?** "We looked at him and were impressed. I don't know why things didn't work out at Washington, but when you get new coaches, sometimes things don't mesh. It will be interesting to see how much he developed in junior college." —Pac-12 head coach

Even before the Utes cracked the top 10, they were a tough matchup. Over the past three seasons, they've improved from 5–7 to 9–4 to 10–3. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR ARRIVAL AT THE TOP OF THE PAC-12?** "There were only two teams in the league that won at least 10 games last year, and they were one of them. They haven't had too many recruiting splashes, but they've done a very good job developing the players they have. And their special teams are the best in the league. That's kept them in a lot of games." —Pac-12 head coach

Utah annually has one of the toughest defenses in the conference. Two years ago, the Utes led the country in sacks (55). Last year they led the Pac-12 in turnovers forced (34). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE?** "Their discipline is probably the best in the league. Even when they were using Mountain West players, they were still tough to score on because they play extremely disciplined. Now that they are recruiting better, they are getting even tougher. They force you into mistakes." —Pac-12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Troy Williams**	Jr.	6-2	200
RB	**Joe Williams**	Sr.	5-11	205
WR	**Cory Butler-Byrd**	Sr.	5-10	180
WR	**Tyrone Smith**	So.	6-4	205 ●
WR	**Tim Patrick**	Sr.	6-5	210
TE	**Siale Fakailoatonga**	Sr.	6-4	255 ●
C	**Nick Nowakowski**	Sr.	6-1	295
RG	**Salesi Uhatafe**	Jr.	6-5	315 ●
LG	**Isaac Asiata**	Sr.	6-3	323 ●
RT	**J.J. Dielman**	Sr.	6-5	300 ●
LT	**Sam Tevi**	Sr.	6-6	305 ●
K	**Andy Phillips**	Sr.	5-10	210 ●
DEFENSE				
DE	**Hunter Dimick**	Sr.	6-3	272 ●
DT	**Lowell Lotulelei**	Jr.	6-2	310 ●
DT	**Filipo Mokofisi**	Jr.	6-3	278
DE	**Kylie Fitts**	Sr.	6-4	265 ●
LB	**David Luafatasaga**	Jr.	6-4	232
LB	**Sunia Tauteoli**	Jr.	6-0	220
NB	**Justin Thomas**	Sr.	5-8	180 ●
CB	**Dominique Hatfield**	Sr.	5-10	175 ●
CB	**Reginald Porter**	Sr.	5-11	185 ●
SS	**Chase Hansen**	So.	6-2	212
FS	**Marcus Williams**	Jr.	6-1	195 ●
P	**Mitch Wishnowsky**	So.	6-2	220

3

Marcus Williams had 3 INTs on passes of 15-plus yards, tied for tops in the Pac-12.

RICK SCUTERI/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.7 ● **FPI CHANCE UTAH WINS**

9/1 vs. Southern Utah **97%** ● **9/10** vs. BYU **67%** ● **9/17** @ San Jose State **70%**
9/23 vs. USC **30%** ● **10/1** @ California **53%** ● **10/8** vs. Arizona **55%**
10/15 @ Oregon State **68%** ● **10/22** @ UCLA **26%** ● **10/29** vs. Washington **38%** ● **11/5** BYE
11/10 @ Arizona State **52%** ● **11/19** vs. Oregon **53%** ● **11/26** @ Colorado **62%**

5 Arizona State

COACH Todd Graham (5th season)
34–19 (2–2 in bowl games)

After a disappointing 6-7 finish in 2015, the Sun Devils have a new offensive coordinator. Now they need to find a new quarterback. Coach Todd Graham, who won 10 games in both 2013 and 2014, must also work wonders on defense. ASU gave up more big plays than any other Power 5 team, allowed 33.5 points per game and was the nation's worst against the pass (337.8 ypg). —K.G.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 (4–5)
BOWL GAME Motel 6 Cactus Bowl vs. West Virginia, 43-42 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Mike Bercovici: 3,860 yards
RUSHING **Demario Richard: 1,098 yards**
RECEIVING Devin Lucien: 1,074 yards
TACKLES **Salamo Fiso: 99**
SACKS Antonio Longino: 11
INTERCEPTIONS **Kareem Orr: 6**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Demario Richard
As the Sun Devils break in a new quarterback, there will be extra pressure on the running game, and that means a heavy workload for Richard. He posted seven 100-yard games as a sophomore last season, averaged 5.3 ypc and finished sixth in the conference with 1,098 yards. Look for Kalen Ballage (6-3, 230) to complement Richard and help form a nice one-two punch, but expect about a 2-to-1 carry ratio in Richard's favor.

X-FACTOR CB/WR/RB Gump Hayes
If you don't have a three-way player in the Pac-12, you're behind the curve. For ASU, that player is Hayes. He'll likely be used primarily as a cornerback after making the switch from running back last season, but you'll see specific offensive sets for him as a hybrid back. He'll also handle punt return duties after averaging 8.4 yards per return last season. Graham has described him as a potential difference maker in all three roles.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
The Sun Devils need to fill four spots on the offensive line, but they still don't know who they'll be blocking for at QB. With four players in the mix to replace the departed Mike Bercovici—Brady White, Manny Wilkins and Bryce Perkins all got equal reps in the spring ahead of the arrival of freshman Dillon Sterling-Cole in the summer—they'll likely take their competition well into fall. They'll be working with a new offensive coordinator in Chip Lindsey (formerly of Southern Miss), who will also serve as the quarterbacks coach.

THE PRESSER

The Sun Devils led the league in sacks (46) but also gave up 88 plays of 20-plus yards—most in the Power 5. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE ASU DEFENSE WAS EXPOSED?** "I think people are starting to figure them out. All it takes is one coordinator to see something and make a change. Then another one notices what the change was and then another and then another. Before you know it, the entire league has figured you out and you have to start over." —Pac-12 offensive coach

It's no secret that Graham likes to blitz. His philosophy is to make the offense defend. But last season it proved costly. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING THE AGGRESSIVE STYLE OF GRAHAM'S DEFENSES?** "It depends on which day you get them. We've played them and they've sacked us a bunch and won. Another time we were able to hit big plays on them. When they have the right personnel, it can be completely destructive. But when they don't, there are holes." —Pac-12 offensive coach

The offense slumped last season (fewer points per game, more turnovers) and never really found a go-to threat. Now there is a quarterback competition. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE QB SITUATION?** "We looked at all of those guys, and they are a pretty diverse group. You've got different guys with different skill sets—pocket passers [White and Sterling-Cole] and mobile guys [Perkins and Wilkins]. I wouldn't be surprised to see them use different packages for different guys." —Pac-12 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Brady White**	RFr.	6-2	200	
RB	**Demario Richard**	Jr.	5-10	220	●
WR	**Cameron Smith**	Jr.	5-11	193	
WR	**Jalen Harvey**	So.	6-1	200	●
WR	**N'Keal Harry**	Fr.	6-4	200	
TE	**Kody Kohl**	Sr.	6-3	235	●
C	**Stephon McCray**	Sr.	6-3	314	
RG	**Steven Miller**	RFr.	6-5	310	
LG	**Sam Jones**	So.	6-5	297	
RT	**Tyson Rising**	Jr.	6-5	275	
LT	**Evan Goodman**	Sr.	6-4	310	●
K	**Zane Gonzalez**	Sr.	6-1	190	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**JoJo Wicker**	So.	6-3	275	●
DT	**Tashon Smallwood**	Jr.	6-1	280	●
NT	**Viliami Latu**	Sr.	6-2	290	
OLB	**Dougladson Subtyl**	Jr.	6-4	245	
ILB	**Christian Sam**	Jr.	6-1	240	●
ILB	**Salamo Fiso**	Sr.	6-0	230	●
OLB	**Koron Crump**	Jr.	6-4	220	
CB	**J'Marcus Rhodes**	Jr.	6-1	195	
CB	**Kareem Orr**	So.	5-11	195	●
SS	**Armand Perry**	So.	6-1	200	
FS	**Laiu Moeakiola**	Sr.	6-1	215	●
P	**Matt Haack**	Sr.	6-1	199	●

2.6

Richard's 2.6 yac led the Pac-12 and was fourth among Power 5 backs (minimum 200 attempts).

RICK SCUTERI/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.7 ● FPI CHANCE ARIZONA STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Northern Arizona **97%** ● **9/10** vs. Texas Tech **58%** ● **9/17** @ UTSA **92%**
9/24 vs. California **60%** ● **10/1** @ USC **12%** ● **10/8** vs. UCLA **32%**
10/15 @ Colorado **50%** ● **10/22** vs. Washington State **54%** ● **10/29** @ Oregon **24%** ● **11/5** BYE
11/10 vs. Utah **48%** ● **11/19** @ Washington **15%** ● **11/25** @ Arizona **28%**

6 Colorado

COACH Mike MacIntyre (4th season)
10–27 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Buffaloes improved considerably on defense, allowing 27 points per game last season compared with 39 in 2014, but the offense couldn't pull its weight, averaging just 25 per contest. Mike MacIntyre enters his fourth season with a 2-25 record in conference games, but he's hopeful he finally has enough depth to get the Buffs to a bowl game for the first time since 2007. —K.G.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4–9 (1–8)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Sefo Liufau: 2,418 yards**
RUSHING **Phillip Lindsay: 653 yards**
RECEIVING Nelson Spruce: 1,053 yards
TACKLES **Chidobe Awuzie: 84**
SACKS **Jimmie Gilbert: 6**
INTERCEPTIONS **Tedric Thompson: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Shay Fields
Expect Fields, a junior, to emerge as the replacement for Nelson Spruce, who left Colorado as the Pac-12's all-time receptions leader (294). An ankle injury slowed Fields last season, but he still managed 42 catches for 598 yards and four touchdowns. At 5-foot-11, 180 pounds, he's not the biggest receiver in the league. But with 19 catches of 10-plus yards last year and a long of 72, he's got the speed to stretch the field. Look for him to be the favorite target among the receiving corps.

X-FACTOR QB Sefo Liufau
Will Liufau be available in 2016? After suffering a Lisfranc foot injury at the end of last season, there is speculation he might redshirt. But that likely won't be known until well into fall camp. That makes Texas Tech graduate transfer Davis Webb intriguing as a one-year option. If Liufau can go, the Buffs get a veteran who has started 29 games and completed 62.9 percent of his passes, with 49 TDs and 29 INTs. If he can't, look for Webb (24 TDs, 13 INTs in 2014) to take over the offense.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Since MacIntyre arrived, he hasn't had a back who can give the offense 20 to 25 carries per game, which is what the staff would prefer. It's a crowded backfield, which includes Phillip Lindsay, who led the team in carries (140) and touchdowns (six) in 2015, converted receiver Donovan Lee and Michael Adkins II. Hopes are also high for Donald "Dino" Gordon, a 2015 four-star signee from Compton, California, coming off his redshirt season.

THE PRESSER

Colorado has improved under MacIntyre—the Buffs lost to Arizona, UCLA, USC and Utah by single-digit margins last year—but still doesn't win enough. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER MACINTYRE IS THE RIGHT GUY?** "I think so. I think he went into a tough spot because—and I like [Jon] Embree a lot, but that was the wrong hire [in 2011] from where they were. You don't give a team like that to a first-time head coach. The wrong hire can set a program back years. You can see they are slowly starting to build out from that." —Pac-12 offensive coach

The Buffs were last in the league in red zone scoring (70 percent) in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THEY STRUGGLE INSIDE THE 20?** "Red zone offense is all about playcalling. I know they brought the guy over from Texas Tech [Darrin Chiaverini, the former Colorado wide receiver hired as co-coordinator] to shake things up. They didn't have anyone who really scared us. We felt like we had a good feel for their tendencies." —Pac-12 defensive coach

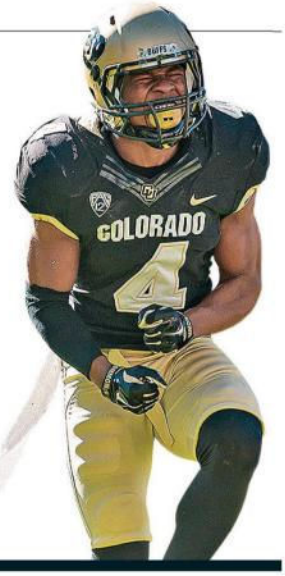
Colorado hasn't been a threat to win the division since it joined the Pac-12 in 2011. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THE BUFFALOES CAN CATCH UP?** "For a while they didn't have the facilities that some of the other schools did. I think they are caught up now. The best recruiting tool is winning, and until they start showing they can do that, they are going to have to put most of their emphasis on developing guys that higher-profile schools passed on." —Pac-12 offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Davis Webb**	Sr.	6-5	225 ●
RB	**Phillip Lindsay**	Jr.	5-9	185 ●
WR	**Devin Ross**	Jr.	5-9	180 ●
WR	**Juwann Winfree**	Jr.	6-3	205
WR	**Shay Fields**	Jr.	5-11	180 ●
TE	**Sean Irwin**	Sr.	6-3	255 ●
C	**Jonathan Huckins**	Jr.	6-4	310 ●
RG	**Tim Lynott**	RFr.	6-2	300
LG	**Gerrad Kough**	Jr.	6-4	302 ●
RT	**Sam Kronshage**	Jr.	6-6	280 ●
LT	**Jeromy Irwin**	Sr.	6-5	310 ●
K	**Diego Gonzalez**	Sr.	6-0	215 ●
DEFENSE				
DE	**Samson Kafovalu**	Sr.	6-4	275 ●
NG	**Josh Tupou**	Sr.	6-3	330
DE	**Jordan Carrell**	Sr.	6-3	305 ●
OLB	**Derek McCartney**	Jr.	6-5	255 ●
ILB	**Kenneth Olugbode**	Sr.	6-1	215 ●
ILB	**Addison Gillam**	Jr.	6-3	230 ●
SLB	**Jimmie Gilbert**	Sr.	6-5	225
CB	**Chidobe Awuzie**	Sr.	6-0	205 ●
CB	**Isaiah Oliver**	So.	6-1	185 ●
SS	**Tedric Thompson**	Sr.	6-0	205 ●
FS	**Ryan Moeller**	Jr.	6-1	210 ●
P	**Alex Kinney**	So.	6-1	215 ●

4



Awuzie's four sacks last season was tied for fifth among Power 5 DBs.

DUSTIN BRADFORD/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

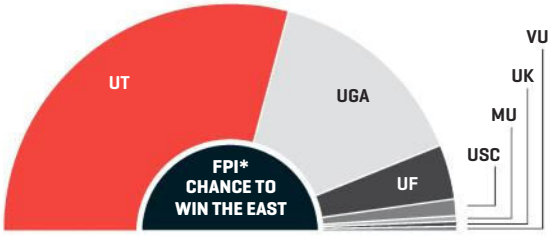
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7 ● **FPI CHANCE COLORADO WINS**

9/2 vs. Colorado State (Denver) **77%** ● **9/10** vs. Idaho State **99%** ● **9/17** @ Michigan **10%**
9/24 @ Oregon **18%** ● **10/1** vs. Oregon State **68%** ● **10/8** @ USC **8%**
10/15 vs. Arizona State **50%** ● **10/22** @ Stanford **13%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/3** vs. UCLA **25%**
11/12 @ Arizona **21%** ● **11/19** vs. Washington State **43%** ● **11/26** vs. Utah **38%**

SEC

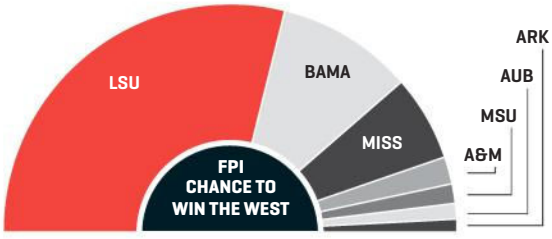
SEC outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
TENNESSEE	5	58.8%
GEORGIA	9	29.3%
FLORIDA	23	8.3%
SOUTH CAROLINA	39	2.6%
MISSOURI	50	0.4%
KENTUCKY	55	0.3%
VANDERBILT	54	0.3%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
LSU	1	58.2%
ALABAMA	6	19.3%
OLE MISS	7	12.3%
TEXAS A&M	14	3.9%
MISSISSIPPI STATE	22	2.5%
AUBURN	21	2.1%
ARKANSAS	27	1.6%



AVERAGE FPI RANK

23.8

PROJECTED CHAMPION

39%

LSU

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB	**Chad Kelly**	Sr.	Ole Miss

ALL-SEC

QB	**Chad Kelly**	Sr.	Ole Miss
RB	**Leonard Fournette**	Jr.	LSU
RB	**Jalen Hurd**	Jr.	Tennessee
WR	**Calvin Ridley**	So.	Alabama
WR	**Fred Ross**	Sr.	Mississippi State
TE	**Evan Engram**	Sr.	Ole Miss
OL	**Ethan Pocic**	Sr.	LSU
OL	**Braden Smith**	Jr.	Auburn
OL	**Dylan Wiesman**	Sr.	Tennessee
OL	**Dan Skipper**	Sr.	Arkansas
OL	**Cam Robinson**	Jr.	Alabama

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

DE	**Myles Garrett**	Jr.	Texas A&M

ALL-SEC

DE	**Myles Garrett**	Jr.	Texas A&M
DE	**Derek Barnett**	Jr.	Tennessee
DL	**Jonathan Allen**	Jr.	Alabama
DT	**Caleb Brantley**	Jr.	Florida
LB	**Skai Moore**	Sr.	South Carolina
LB	**Zach Cunningham**	Jr.	Vanderbilt
LB	**Jalen Reeves-Maybin**	Sr.	Tennessee
CB	**Jalen Tabor**	Jr.	Florida
CB	**Cameron Sutton**	Sr.	Tennessee
S	**Dominick Sanders**	Jr.	Georgia
S	**Eddie Jackson**	Sr.	Alabama

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Daniel Carlson**	Jr.	Auburn
P	**Johnny Townsend**	Jr.	Florida
RS	**Evan Berry**	Jr.	Tennessee

MUST-SEE GAMES

SEPTEMBER

- **9/3** Alabama vs. USC (94*)
- **9/5** Ole Miss vs. Florida State (96)
- **9/17** Alabama @ Ole Miss (95)

OCTOBER

- **10/1** Tennessee @ Georgia (94)
- **10/15** Alabama @ Tennessee (96)
- **10/22** Ole Miss @ LSU (93)

NOVEMBER

- **11/5** Alabama @ LSU (97)
- **11/12** LSU @ Arkansas (90)
- **11/24** LSU @ Texas A&M (95)

*Matchup quality (0-100 scale) rates games based on team strength (FPI) and how close the contest is expected to be.

TIM HEITMAN/USA TODAY SPORTS

STRENGTH OF SCHEDULE

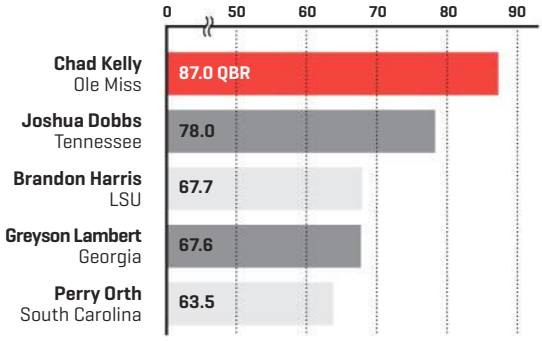
No league has it harder: Five SEC squads have top-10 slates in 2016, per SOS.

19

AVERAGE SOS RANK

TOP RETURNING QBs

Chad Kelly and Joshua Dobbs are the headliners. The rest? Fighting for QB1.



Calvin Ridley

Note to SEC teams not named Bama: Derrick Henry is gone, but there's another weapon loose in T-Town, and he's out to keep the Tide on top.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Tennessee

COACH Butch Jones (4th season)
21–17 (2–0 in bowl games)

Stop us if you've heard this before: Expectations are sky-high in Knoxville. Butch Jones has upped his win total by two games in back-to-back years, so anything but double-digit W's—and an SEC title-game berth—would be a disappointment in 2016. The Vols face consistency worries, but with 19 starters back, they enter the season as trendy East favorites again. —Edward Aschoff

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (5–3)
BOWL GAME Outback Bowl vs. Northwestern, 45-6 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Joshua Dobbs: 2,291 yards**
RUSHING **Jalen Hurd: 1,288 yards**
RECEIVING Von Pearson: 409 yards
TACKLES **Jalen Reeves-Maybin: 105**
SACKS **Derek Barnett: 10**
INTERCEPTIONS **Todd Kelly Jr.: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Joshua Dobbs
While the rest of the SEC enters the fall grappling with unknowns (or worse, known liabilities) behind center, Dobbs returns as one of the few marquee names. He is tough to corral—leading all conference QBs with 671 rush yards and 11 TDs last season—but Dobbs must now prove he can also hit his downfield marks. The senior threw for 200 yards just five times in '15 and was held under 100 twice. He completed 40.0 percent of passes thrown 15-plus yards downfield, which put him right in the middle of the Power 5 QB pack (T31).

X-FACTOR New DC Bob Shoop
Tennessee's D never ranked higher than No. 7 in the SEC under John Jancek (2013-15), but Shoop has led top-25 units in total defense in each of the past five years, first at Vanderbilt, then at Penn State. He employs a more aggressive system, which should better leverage the Vols' speed, especially with the returns of likely early-round draft picks CB Cameron Sutton and LB Jalen Reeves-Maybin. With a team that surrendered three double-digit leads last year, Shoop's arrival in Knoxville is just what the scoreboard ordered.

POSITION BATTLE Left tackle
Longtime starter Kyler Kerbyson is gone, and RT Chance Hall missed the spring with an injury, so Brett Kendrick shifted to his spot. That leaves redshirt freshman Drew Richmond to battle senior Dontavius Blair on the left. Richmond could be the future at this position, but he'll have to adjust after moving from the right side.

THE PRESSER

Dobbs broke free for 27 runs of 10-plus yards in '15, tied with Mississippi State's Dak Prescott for most among SEC QBs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DOBBS THE RUNNER?** "He has good feet for a bigger guy, and he knows how to get skinny. You have to send four down linemen, and you may have to dedicate a linebacker to spy him to take away that avenue, because if he's going to throw, he's gonna get the ball out quick. If it ain't out quick, he's gonna scramble. That's when it's tough, because you have to have a 'backer that's fast enough to track him down." —SEC defensive coach

The Vols never found a dominant vertical threat last year: No UT receiver reached 500 yards. Junior WRs Josh Malone and Josh Smith return, but the duo combined for 96 targets in '15—just 24 more than RBs Jalen Hurd and Alvin Kamara. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DOWNFIELD PRODUCTION?** "[Dobbs] can't throw the ball down the field. That's not his bag. His bag is for them to motion the back out of the backfield, throw it to him out in space, and then the guy makes defenders miss and goes 25 yards. That's a guy you want to make throw the ball and make play quarterback." —Power 5 defensive coach

The D got burned for 30 plays of 25-plus yards in 2015, 10th most in the SEC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW SHOOP CAN FIX THE LEAKS?** "His D's have been among the best in the country in first- and second-down efficiency. They get off the field on third downs and eliminate the possibility of big-play opportunities. —SEC head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Joshua Dobbs**	Sr.	6-3	207 ●
RB	**Jalen Hurd**	Jr.	6-4	240 ●
WR	**Josh Malone**	Jr.	6-3	197 ●
WR	**Preston Williams**	So.	6-4	209
WR	**Josh Smith**	Jr.	6-1	216 ●
TE	**Ethan Wolf**	Jr.	6-6	245 ●
C	**Coleman Thomas**	Jr.	6-5	301 ●
RG	**Dylan Wiesman**	Sr.	6-4	304 ●
LG	**Jashon Robertson**	Jr.	6-3	315 ●
RT	**Brett Kendrick**	Jr.	6-6	318 ●
LT	**Drew Richmond**	RFr.	6-5	301
K	**Aaron Medley**	Jr.	6-2	189 ●
DEFENSE				
DE	**Derek Barnett**	Jr.	6-3	257 ●
DT	**Kahlil McKenzie**	So.	6-3	344
DT	**Kendal Vickers**	Jr.	6-3	286 ●
DE	**Corey Vereen**	Sr.	6-2	249 ●
WLB	**Jalen Reeves-Maybin**	Sr.	6-0	225 ●
MLB	**Darrin Kirkland Jr.**	So.	6-1	224 ●
NB	**Malik Foreman**	Sr.	5-10	178 ●
CB	**Cameron Sutton**	Sr.	5-11	186 ●
CB	**Justin Martin**	Jr.	6-1	183 ●
SS	**Evan Berry**	Jr.	5-11	207
FS	**Todd Kelly Jr.**	Jr.	5-11	208
P	**Trevor Daniel**	Jr.	6-1	248 ●

480

Hurd gained 480 of his 1,288 rush yards in the first quarter last year.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.2 ● **FPI CHANCE TENNESSEE WINS**

9/3 vs. Appalachian State **95%** ● **9/10** vs. Virginia Tech (Bristol, Tenn.) **86%** ● **9/17** vs. Ohio **99%**
9/24 vs. Florida **81%** ● **10/1** @ Georgia **56%** ● **10/8** @ Texas A&M **59%**
10/15 vs. Alabama **59%** ● **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** @ South Carolina **83%** ● **11/5** vs. Tennessee Tech **99%**
11/12 vs. Kentucky **94%** ● **11/19** vs. Missouri **93%** ● **11/26** @ Vanderbilt **89%**

2 Georgia

COACH Kirby Smart (1st season)

Another year, another season of unmet expectations in Athens. Kirby Smart takes over for Mark Richt, who was let go after 15 years, and the Nick Saban disciple inherits talent—and unknowns. The offense faces questions galore at the skill spots, and the D hinges on a potentially dynamic, if still young, lineup. In the East, that should be enough to vie for a trip to Atlanta. —E.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10-3 (5-3)
BOWL GAME TaxSlayer Bowl
vs. Penn State, 24-17 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Greyson Lambert: 1,959 yards**
RUSHING **Sony Michel: 1,161 yards**
RECEIVING Malcolm Mitchell: 865 yards
TACKLES Jake Ganus: 102
SACKS Leonard Floyd: 4½
INTERCEPTIONS **Dominick Sanders: 6**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Nick Chubb
Georgia is relatively green on offense, so Chubb—he of 13 straight 100-plus-yard games—will be a welcome sight for folks in Athens. The junior suffered a gruesome knee injury last October, but when he's healthy, he is easily the best player on the eastern side of the SEC. And with question marks under center, plus a depleted wide receiver corps (NFL-bound Malcolm Mitchell accounted for more than half of the unit's receiving yards last year), Chubb must reassert himself as a dominant backfield force. If not? The Bulldogs could really get exposed.

X-FACTOR DT Trenton Thompson
After registering just two sacks and 11½ TFLs in 2015, Georgia's defensive line desperately needs a playmaker. Thompson, a sophomore, looks ready to make that leap. His development slowed last year (just 2½ TFLs and half a sack), but the former five-star prospect screams All-American under Smart's watch.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Pick your poison, Georgia. Graduate transfer and returning starter Greyson Lambert struggled deep into SEC play, averaging just 164.3 pass ypg. Junior Brice Ramsey, the early 2015 favorite, punted almost as much as he threw last season. True freshman Jacob Eason, the top-ranked prep QB in 2016, is clearly the future of the position but has yet to take a collegiate snap. And though he boasts the most pure talent of the trio, the Bulldogs' staff has said it wants to bring him along carefully. So many options ... so little clarity.

THE PRESSER

With Mitchell gone, the Dawgs return no WR with more than 380 receiving yards. That's a challenge for an air attack that rarely found the end zone in '15, even with Mitchell: 14 TDs (T101 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE WR CONUNDRUM?** "It's not like there are guys who are going to scare you. Your inexperience at QB and your lack of depth at wide receiver would make it much more difficult for a guy like Chubb, even if he is healthy, to be a guy that you would not take out of the game defensively." —Power 5 defensive coach

The line was Georgia's weakest unit on D last year, and its lack of penetration showed: The Dawgs collected 21 total sacks (T94 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW AN EVEN YOUNGER 2016 UNIT MAY IMPROVE?** "They'll play to their strengths up front. They'll let them play thicker on guys, get their hands on guys and make them command double-teams, especially with the two interior guys [Thompson and John Atkins], which frees up your 'backers." —Power 5 defensive coach

UGa's entire starting secondary returns, led by ball hawk S Dominick Sanders. The junior came up with 6 INTs for a backfield that was the stingiest in the nation last year, allowing 156.5 pass ypg. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY SANDERS IS A PROBLEM?** "He's got range for a safety. He does a good job of reading the QB and where he's throwing the ball. He's a little like [former Bulldog] Bacarri Rambo, as far as route progressions, and he understands releases and pattern matching as a safety." —Power 5 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Jacob Eason**	Fr.	6-5	211 ●
RB	**Nick Chubb**	Jr.	5-10	220 ●
WR	**Terry Godwin**	So.	5-11	174 ●
WR	**Reggie Davis**	Sr.	6-0	170 ●
WR	**Jayson Stanley**	So.	6-2	204
TE	**Jeb Blazevich**	Jr.	6-5	248 ●
C	**Brandon Kublanow**	Sr.	6-3	282 ●
RG	**Greg Pyke**	Sr.	6-6	313 ●
LG	**Dyshon Sims**	Jr.	6-4	293
RT	**Tyler Catalina**	Sr.	6-5	303
LT	**Isaiah Wynn**	Jr.	6-2	278 ●
K	**Rodrigo Blankenship**	RFr.	6-1	185
DEFENSE				
DE	**Jonathan Ledbetter**	So.	6-4	251
NG	**DaQuan Hawkins**	So.	6-4	302
DT	**Trenton Thompson**	So.	6-4	307 ●
OLB	**Lorenzo Carter**	Jr.	6-6	242
MLB	**Natrez Patrick**	So.	6-3	248
WLB	**Tim Kimbrough**	Sr.	6-0	226 ●
SLB	**Davin Bellamy**	Jr.	6-5	241
CB	**Malkom Parrish**	Jr.	5-10	188 ●
CB	**Juwuan Briscoe**	So.	5-11	193 ●
SS	**Quincy Mauger**	Sr.	6-0	200 ●
FS	**Dominick Sanders**	Jr.	6-0	189 ●
P	**Marshall Long**	Fr.	6-2	223

9.5

Chubb's 9.5 ypc outside the tackles in 2015 was second most in the Power 5.

RONALD C. MODRA/SPORTS IMAGERY/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9 ● **FPI CHANCE GEORGIA WINS**

9/3 vs. North Carolina (Atlanta) **62%** ● **9/10** vs. Nicholls State **99%** ● **9/17** @ Missouri **77%**
9/24 @ Ole Miss **38%** ● **10/1** vs. Tennessee **44%** ● **10/8** @ South Carolina **70%**
10/15 vs. Vanderbilt **90%** **10/22** BYE ● **10/29** vs. Florida (Jacksonville, Fla.) **63%** **11/5** @ Kentucky **82%**
11/12 vs. Auburn **70%** ● **11/19** vs. UL Lafayette **97%** ● **11/26** vs. Georgia Tech **86%**

3 Florida

COACH Jim McElwain (2nd season)
10–4 (0–1 in bowl games)

Jim McElwain engineered an epic 2015 turnaround in Gainesville, leading the Gators, winners of 11 games combined the previous two seasons, to 10 victories and an SEC title-game berth in his first year at the helm. The offense still faces major hurdles, but the defense will be elite again, so Florida will contend once more for the SEC East in McElwain's encore. —E.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–4 (7–1)
BOWL GAME Buffalo Wild Wings Citrus Bowl vs. Michigan, 41–7 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Treon Harris: 1,676 yards**
RUSHING Kelvin Taylor: 1,035 yards
RECEIVING **Antonio Callaway: 678 yards**
TACKLES Antonio Morrison: 103
SACKS Alex McCalister: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS Vernon Hargreaves III: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Jarrad Davis
The senior opted to return to Gainesville for 2016, welcome news for a linebacking corps already down Antonio Morrison, the Gators' leading tackler in 2014 and 2015. Davis is a hard-hitting general in the middle of the field but can also cover ground sideline to sideline. And while injury cut short his 2014 campaign, he rebounded in a big way last year, ringing up 98 tackles (46 solo), 11 TFLs and 3½ sacks, a team high among linebackers.

X-FACTOR DT Caleb Brantley
The Gators invaded opposing backfields often in 2015, totaling 101 TFLs, and if that dominance holds steady this fall, Brantley will likely be the catalyst. He showed flashes of pure brilliance in 2015, most notably a five-game stretch in which he registered at least half a tackle for loss in each outing, but wasn't always asked to do a ton. That will change in 2016, with Jonathan Bullard and his 17½ TFLs and 6½ sacks off to the NFL. Brantley might not be a stat machine (three sacks in '15), but he is disruptive and athletic.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
There will be pressure until a Gators QB finally proves he can consistently throw against SEC opponents. Former starter Treon Harris moved to receiver, then was suspended in the spring, so Luke Del Rio, who walked on last year, is the favorite. Still, Del Rio failed to establish himself in stints at Alabama and Oregon State, which leaves room for Purdue graduate transfer Austin Appleby and true freshmen Feleipe' Franks and Kyle Trask to enter the race.

THE PRESSER

After taking over starting duties midway through '15, Harris completed just 48.1 percent of his passes, and Florida's aerial attack nosedived in turn: The Gators fell short of 200 pass yards in six of their final seven games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW DEL RIO COULD IMPROVE THE QB PLAY?** "He'll be a better game manager, but he's a walk-on QB at best. He'll be more of that Will Grier type, where he's going to manage it and they'll build that offense around his qualities—quick reads, quick decisions, drop back and throw it deep on a go route. It won't be overly complex the way Mac wants." —SEC defensive coach

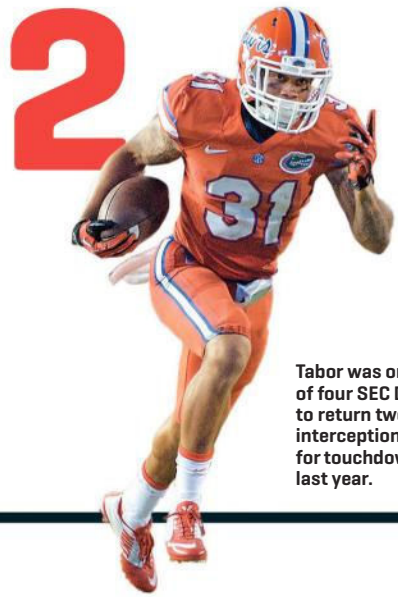
The Gators lose Vernon Hargreaves III (10 career INTs, 28 pass breakups) but look to have a stud in junior CB Jalen Tabor. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TABOR STACKS UP?** "He can claim that he's as good, if not better, than Vernon. Even though he's around that 6-foot range with long limbs, he can play low with his feet and he can bend. He has very fluid hips, and he can come in and out of breaks, he can transition, he can do all that stuff in lost coverage." —SEC defensive coach

The secondary hole is bigger than just Hargreaves, with safety Keanu Neale and corner Brian Poole (17 combined starts in '15) also having departed. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO ATTACK FLORIDA'S SECOND LEVEL?** "I would work the slot and attack. Senior safety Marcus Maye is as good as anybody, but he still has deficiencies in coverage. Whoever the other safety is will be a guy people will try to go at." —SEC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Luke Del Rio**	So.	6-1	216	●
RB	**Mark Thompson**	Jr.	6-2	228	
WR	**Brandon Powell**	Jr.	5-9	184	●
WR	**Antonio Callaway**	So.	5-11	198	●
WR	**Ahmad Fulwood**	Sr.	6-4	208	
TE	**DeAndre Goolsby**	Jr.	6-4	243	
C	**Cameron Dillard**	Jr.	6-4	308	●
RG	**Tyler Jordan**	So.	6-4	292	
LG	**Martez Ivey**	So.	6-5	302	●
RT	**Fred Johnson**	So.	6-6	305	
LT	**David Sharpe**	Jr.	6-6	355	●
K	**Eddy Pineiro**	So.	6-0	178	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Bryan Cox**	Sr.	6-3	268	●
DT	**Caleb Brantley**	Jr.	6-2	314	●
NT	**Joey Ivie**	Sr.	6-3	295	
DE	**Cece Jefferson**	So.	6-1	275	
WLB	**Alex Anzalone**	Sr.	6-3	244	
MLB	**Jarrad Davis**	Sr.	6-2	230	●
SLB	**Daniel McMillian**	Sr.	6-1	219	
CB	**Jalen Tabor**	Jr.	6-0	191	●
CB	**Quincy Wilson**	Jr.	6-1	209	●
SS	**Nick Washington**	Jr.	6-0	195	
FS	**Marcus Maye**	Sr.	6-0	207	●
P	**Johnny Townsend**	Jr.	6-1	202	●



Tabor was one of four SEC DBs to return two interceptions for touchdowns last year.

PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.4 ● FPI CHANCE FLORIDA WINS

9/3 vs. Massachusetts **99%** ● **9/10** vs. Kentucky **84%** ● **9/17** vs. North Texas **99%**
9/24 @ Tennessee **19%** ● **10/1** @ Vanderbilt **72%** ● **10/8** vs. LSU **23%** ● **10/15** vs. Missouri **79%**
10/22 BYE ● **10/29** vs. Georgia (Jacksonville, Fla.) **37%** ● **11/5** @ Arkansas **41%**
11/12 vs. South Carolina **72%** ● **11/19** vs. Presbyterian **99%** ● **11/26** @ Florida State **14%**

4 South Carolina

COACH Will Muschamp (1st season)

Will Muschamp, who took his first head-coaching gig as Urban Meyer's successor at Florida, now finds himself in the position of replacing yet another legend. Steve Spurrier hung up his visor mid-2015, so after one year as Auburn's DC, Muschamp arrives in Columbia to return the Gamecocks to SEC East contenders. Losses at WR, OL and DL will make that a tough task in Year 1. —E.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Perry Orth: 1,929 yards**
RUSHING Brandon Wilds: 567 yards
RECEIVING Pharoh Cooper: 973 yards
TACKLES **Skai Moore: 111**
SACKS **Darius English: 4½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Skai Moore: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Skai Moore
The rangy, hard-hitting linebacker could have left early for the NFL but opted instead to come back to the Gamecocks, despite the changes taking root in Columbia. With his return, Moore has a real chance to lead South Carolina in tackles for a school-record fourth consecutive season (260 in his career). The senior not only stops the run and rushes the passer, he is also tremendous in coverage. Moore broke up four passes last year and has reeled in 11 career interceptions.

X-FACTOR DE Darius English
Muschamp's first order of business on D will be to amp up South Carolina's pass rush. Opposing QBs were sacked, hit or under duress on only 22.6 percent of dropbacks in '15, a rate that put the Gamecocks just outside the Power 5's bottom 10. Be on the lookout for English, who could explode at the hybrid Buck spot. His 4½ sacks led South Carolina last year, but allowing the senior to move around more and play standing up or squatting with his hand on the ground should up his value. While he's not the biggest end (6-foot-5, 240 pounds), English has enough straightaway speed to be dominant in his new rusher role.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
New OC Kurt Roper wants to run an up-tempo spread, so mobility under center will be critical. And while a trio of QBs who logged starts in 2015 return (Perry Orth, Lorenzo Nunez, Connor Mitch), true freshman and 2016 ESPN 300 dual-threat Brandon McIlwain may be best suited to run Roper's O in the long run.

THE PRESSER

USC must replace three starting linemen, including OT Brandon Shell, who started 47 straight games from 2012 to 2015. That's tough on a unit that yielded so-so returns (at best) in '15: 1,145 rush yards before contact, 10th in the SEC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE SHAPE OF THE LINE FOR 2016?** "The O-line's not very good. It wasn't good last year, and you lose your best player. There are a lot of third-year sophomores, fourth-year juniors that just aren't SEC players." —SEC offensive coach

Also gone is WR Pharoh Cooper and his 94.9 all-purpose yards per game from '15. There is a huge drop-off in production after Cooper, with Deebo Samuel and Matrick Belton the leading returners at receiver. They totaled 23 catches and 282 yards last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW SOUTH CAROLINA CAN FILL THE PHAROH-SIZED HOLE?** "Deebo Samuel has a chance to have a good future. He's big and thick, and he has some quickness to him. He's not a slow kid, but he's not a burner." —SEC offensive coach

The Gamecocks don't know which Muschamp D they'll get. His 2015 Auburn unit allowed 416.8 ypg in SEC play, second most in the conference, but his defenses in Gainesville never ranked below No. 15 nationally. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO ATTACK HIS SCHEME?** "They jump in and out of multiple fronts. The hardest part is identifying what they are in and making sure you get that communicated well so that your combinations in the run game and your turns and protections are all coordinated." —SEC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Brandon McIlwain**	Fr.	6-0	206 ●
RB	**David Williams**	Jr.	6-1	216
WR	**Deebo Samuel**	So.	6-0	205 ●
WR	**Bryan Edwards**	Fr.	6-3	205 ●
WR	**Jamari Smith**	Jr.	5-10	204
TE	**Kevin Crosby**	So.	6-1	226
C	**Alan Knott**	Jr.	6-4	280 ●
RG	**Cory Helms**	Jr.	6-4	306
LG	**Zack Bailey**	So.	6-6	313
RT	**D.J. Park**	Jr.	6-4	330
LT	**Mason Zandi**	Sr.	6-8	308 ●
K	**Elliott Fry**	Sr.	6-0	165 ●
DEFENSE				
DE	**Marquavius Lewis**	Sr.	6-4	270 ●
DT	**Kelsey Griffin**	Sr.	6-2	302
NT	**Taylor Stallworth**	Jr.	6-2	310 ●
DE	**Daniel Fennell**	RFr.	6-2	235
WLB	**Larenz Bryant**	Sr.	6-0	217
MLB	**T.J. Holloman**	Sr.	6-2	240 ●
SLB	**Skai Moore**	Sr.	6-2	218 ●
CB	**Jamarcus King**	Jr.	6-1	170
CB	**Rico McWilliams**	Sr.	5-11	179 ●
SS	**Jordan Diggs**	Sr.	6-0	211 ●
FS	**Chaz Elder**	Sr.	6-2	203
P	**Sean Kelly**	Sr.	5-10	195 ●

10

Moore was one of two SEC players with at least 2 sacks, 4 INTs and 10 disrupted dropbacks.

DAVID T. FOSTER III/CHARLOTTE OBSERVER/TNS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.2 ● FPI CHANCE SOUTH CAROLINA WINS

9/1 @ Vanderbilt **58%** ● **9/10** @ Mississippi State **28%** ● **9/17** vs. East Carolina **90%**
9/24 @ Kentucky **58%** ● **10/1** vs. Texas A&M **37%** ● **10/8** vs. Georgia **30%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** vs. Massachusetts **98%** ● **10/29** vs. Tennessee **18%** ● **11/5** vs. Missouri **69%**
11/12 @ Florida **28%** ● **11/19** vs. Western Carolina **98%** ● **11/26** @ Clemson **10%**

5 Missouri

COACH Barry Odom (1st season)

After Gary Pinkel, the program's winningest coach (118-73), resigned last season, Mizzou looked in-house to promote former Tiger and D-coordinator Barry Odom to headman. He'll benefit from a dependable defense but must hope the introduction of an up-tempo attack will spark an offense that was punchless in 2015. In the end, another middling SEC finish looks to be in store. —E.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5-7 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Drew Lock: 1,332 yards**
RUSHING **Ish Witter: 518 yards**
RECEIVING **J'Mon Moore: 350 yards**
TACKLES Kentrell Brothers: 152
SACKS **Charles Harris: 7**
INTERCEPTIONS Ian Simon: 2

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Drew Lock
Even after completing just 45.6 percent of his passes in SEC play, with two TDs and six picks, and owning an SEC-worst 23.4 QBR among starters, Lock is crucial to Mizzou's success. There just aren't enough playmakers at the other skill spots to take the lead—the Tigers were one of five teams in the nation to fall short of 2,000 yards rushing and passing in 2015. If there is a potential salve to the offensive woes, it's that the sophomore at least appeared more comfortable this spring with new OC Josh Heupel's up-tempo style.

X-FACTOR WR Chris Black
The Alabama transfer might just be the dependable safety net Lock needs to get Mizzou humming. Though he never caught fire in Tuscaloosa—25 catches for 290 yards in three seasons—Black is a former 22nd-ranked ESPN 150 prep and is arguably the most talented wideout in Columbia. Consider: Missouri had no vertical attack (16 catches of 25-plus yards in '15, T119 in the FBS), nor a single go-to receiver. The Tigers return no one with more than 30 catches or 350 yards last year.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
New faces, redshirts and backups abound. Down four starters with nearly 130 career starts, the O-line returns only a couple of semi-familiar names in Nate Crawford and Alec Abeln, who combined for 11 starts last season. Both tackles will start from scratch, while a couple of sophomores, OT Paul Adams and G Kevin Pendleton, got some work toward the end of the season and could man the right side.

THE PRESSER

In his seven starts vs. SEC teams last year, Lock threw for more than 150 yards just once—151 against Florida. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CAPITALIZE ON LOCK'S STRUGGLES?** "The way you exploit them is to have corners who can play press and take away all the short throws. That will force Lock to make throws where he actually has to sit there and read coverages and throw in tight windows, which is where he struggles." —SEC defensive coach

New DC DeMontie Cross (TCU) employed a lot of man coverage in Fort Worth, but Mizzou played mostly zone when Odom ran the D. Even with solid senior CB Aarion Penton back, fitting those puzzle pieces might prove tricky. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT A NEW PHILOSOPHY MEANS FOR THE MIZZOU D?** "I think [zone] fits the players that they have. They played more zone because they really couldn't match up in the back end. If they stay par for the course with Cross, that's going to put their corners more on islands and in one-on-one situations." —Power 5 defensive coach

Even without stockpiling blue-chip talent on D (three ESPN 300 defenders total from 2013 to '15), Mizzou held opponents to fewer than 200 pass yards eight times in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE DEFENSE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE TEAM'S BACKBONE?** "They move [linemen] around a lot, making them better pass rushers. They'll get guys on the linemen they know they can whip the most so they can win most of the battles in there." —SEC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Drew Lock**	So.	6-4	221	●
RB	**Ish Witter**	Jr.	5-10	190	
WR	**J'Mon Moore**	Jr.	6-3	190	●
WR	**Nate Brown**	Jr.	6-3	205	●
WR	**Chris Black**	Sr.	6-0	192	
TE	**Sean Culkin**	Sr.	6-6	245	●
C	**Alec Abeln**	Jr.	6-3	290	
RG	**Kevin Pendleton**	So.	6-4	315	
LG	**Nate Crawford**	Jr.	6-5	300	●
RT	**Paul Adams**	So.	6-6	290	
LT	**Tyler Howell**	Jr.	6-8	305	
K	**Tucker McCann**	Fr.	6-0	185	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Charles Harris**	Jr.	6-3	255	●
DT	**Harold Brantley**	Sr.	6-3	280	●
NG	**Josh Augusta**	Sr.	6-4	345	●
DE	**Walter Brady**	So.	6-3	255	●
WLB	**Joey Burkett**	Jr.	6-2	210	
MLB	**Michael Scherer**	Sr.	6-3	235	●
SLB	**Donavin Newsom**	Sr.	6-2	230	●
CB	**Aarion Penton**	Sr.	5-10	190	●
CB	**John Gibson**	Sr.	6-0	190	
SS	**Anthony Sherrils**	Jr.	6-0	200	●
FS	**Thomas Wilson**	Jr.	5-10	190	
P	**Corey Fatony**	So.	5-11	185	●

25

Harris' seven sacks accounted for 25 percent of Mizzou's production last year.

ED ZURGA/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.5 ● **FPI CHANCE MISSOURI WINS**

9/3 @ West Virginia **20%** ● **9/10** vs. Eastern Michigan **94%** ● **9/17** vs. Georgia **23%**
9/24 vs. Delaware State **99%** ● **10/1** @ LSU **5%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** @ Florida **21%**
10/22 vs. Middle Tennessee **81%** ● **10/29** vs. Kentucky **65%** ● **11/5** @ South Carolina **31%**
11/12 vs. Vanderbilt **64%** ● **11/19** @ Tennessee **8%** ● **11/26** vs. Arkansas **37%**

6 Kentucky

COACH Mark Stoops (4th season)
12–24 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Wildcats have cruised to mid-October the past two years with a combined 9-3 record. Then came the second half, as Kentucky flatlined to a combined 1-11, missing the postseason both years. Padding the 2016 win column early will be a tall order, with road trips to Gainesville and Tuscaloosa by Oct. 1. A new QB and his new OC will have to learn on the fly—and fast. —E.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (2–6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Patrick Towles: 2,148 yards
RUSHING **Stanley Williams: 855 yards**
RECEIVING **Garrett Johnson: 694 yards**
TACKLES Josh Forrest: 93
SACKS Josh Forrest: 3½
INTERCEPTIONS **J.D. Harmon: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Drew Barker
Mark Stoops knows that if his team is going to get over the proverbial hump, the Kentucky-bred quarterback will have to be its catalyst. The coach will also need to see improvement from the former four-star prep. Barker started Kentucky's final two games in 2015 as a redshirt freshman—and looked the part. He is a legitimate weapon on the ground, but he completed just 50 percent of his 70 pass attempts last year, throwing for one touchdown and two interceptions.

X-FACTOR New OC Eddie Gran
Gran, a Cincinnati transplant, has his work cut out for him 86 miles down I-75 in Lexington. The Wildcats have not ranked higher than ninth in the SEC in total offense and scoring since 2010. Last year was especially egregious, with Kentucky throwing six more picks (16) than touchdowns (10). Unlike his predecessors, Gran is not an air raid disciple, but his success running up-tempo, pass-heavy attacks at prior stops should excite the fans in Kentucky. Last year his Bearcats pass offense gained 359.9 ypg, sixth most in the country.

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
The Wildcats lose six of their top seven tacklers from 2015, including, most critically, LB Josh Forrest. The unit was dealt an additional blow with the offseason dismissal of Jason Hatcher (marijuana trafficking), so Kentucky will depend on a pair of Big Ten transfers—Courtney Love from Nebraska and De'Niro Laster from Minnesota—to fill the hole in the defense's depleted middle.

THE PRESSER

Stanley Williams may have durability concerns, but he is a force: His 7.1 ypc in '15 was second among SEC rushers, behind Georgia's Nick Chubb. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WILLIAMS' STRENGTHS?** "For a smaller-sized guy [5-9, 196 pounds]—he's really compact—he can get the tough yards. He's got some burst to him and some speed to get you double-digit runs." —Power 5 defensive coach

Kentucky's O-line returns 87 starts in '16, but there is still cause for concern: The Wildcats allowed 30 total sacks last year (T84 in the FBS) and 2.3 per game in SEC play. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR O-LINE WOES?** "Their line is marginal by SEC standards. When you're marginal up front, you have a hard time protecting the QB because you're usually down [in a game]. You become a little bit more predictable, and that allows teams to tee off on you and try to exploit your weakness—the ability of your O-line to move in space while protecting the QB on throws to try and get you back in the game." —Power 5 defensive coach

The Wildcats allowed 5.8 ypp in SEC outings, the conference's third-worst rate, while registering 17 sacks all year (T108 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW KENTUCKY'S D CAN COMPENSATE?** "They spread out on defense with all their odd overload pressures. You get odd overload from the boundary, odd overload from the field, and they really do a good job with the multiplicity of coverages in the back end—as good as anybody in the country." —SEC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Drew Barker**	So.	6-3	218	
RB	**Stanley Williams**	Jr.	5-9	196	●
WR	**Dorian Baker**	Jr.	6-3	208	●
WR	**Garrett Johnson**	Jr.	5-11	175	●
WR	**Jeff Badet**	Jr.	6-0	175	●
TE	**C.J. Conrad**	So.	6-5	245	●
C	**Jon Toth**	Sr.	6-5	310	●
RG	**Ramsey Meyers**	Jr.	6-4	320	●
LG	**Nick Haynes**	Jr.	6-3	306	●
RT	**Kyle Meadows**	Jr.	6-5	302	●
LT	**Cole Mosier**	Jr.	6-6	335	
K	**Austin MacGinnis**	Jr.	5-10	180	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Courtney Miggins**	Sr.	6-5	285	
NT	**Matt Elam**	Jr.	6-7	360	
DT	**Regie Meant**	Jr.	6-4	302	●
OLB	**Denzil Ware**	So.	6-2	255	●
WLB	**Jordan Jones**	So.	6-2	215	
MLB	**Courtney Love**	Jr.	6-2	245	
NB	**Blake McClain**	Sr.	5-11	200	●
CB	**Chris Westry**	So.	6-4	195	●
CB	**Derrick Baity**	So.	6-3	180	
SS	**Mike Edwards**	So.	6-0	200	
FS	**Marcus McWilson**	Sr.	6-0	208	●
P	**Grant McKinniss**	Fr.	6-1	210	

6.7

Williams rushed for 6.7 ypc on first down last year, third best in the SEC.

DAVID STEPHENSON/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.0 ● **FPI CHANCE KENTUCKY WINS**

9/3 vs. Southern Miss **80%** ● **9/10** @ Florida **16%** ● **9/17** vs. New Mexico State **94%**
9/24 vs. South Carolina **42%** ● **10/1** @ Alabama **6%** ● **10/8** vs. Vanderbilt **58%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** vs. Mississippi State **30%** ● **10/29** @ Missouri **36%** ● **11/5** vs. Georgia **18%**
11/12 @ Tennessee **6%** ● **11/19** vs. Austin Peay **99%** ● **11/26** @ Louisville **12%**

7 Vanderbilt

COACH Derek Mason (3rd season)
7–17 (0–0 in bowl games)

A 4-8 follow-up to a 3-9 debut doesn't look like much on paper, but Derek Mason's squad was much improved in Year 2. The defense, which jumped from No. 68 in the country in 2014 to No. 28 last year, is starting to resemble a Mason-led unit, and the offense seems to have finally found some stability under center. Don't look now, but Vanderbilt might just be bowl eligible in 2016. —E.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4–8 (2–6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Johnny McCrary: 1,533 yards
RUSHING **Ralph Webb: 1,152 yards**
RECEIVING **Trent Sherfield: 659 yards**
TACKLES **Zach Cunningham: 103**
SACKS **Zach Cunningham: 4½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Oren Burks: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Ralph Webb
Only two SEC running backs returning in 2016—LSU's Leonard Fournette and Tennessee's Jalen Hurd—outrushed Webb (96.0 ypg) last year. So for the third straight season, the junior will be the linchpin of the Commodores' offensive attack. In 2015, Webb's 1,340 total yards accounted for just over a third of Vandy's offensive output. Not surprisingly, the team goes as Webb goes: Four of his five touchdowns last season came in the Commodores' four wins.

X-FACTOR WR C.J. Duncan
Junior WR Trent Sherfield was a pleasant surprise last season (six games with 50-plus receiving yards), but he'll need a castmate. Enter Duncan, who returns after missing all of 2015 with a leg injury. The versatile junior can line up in the backfield, be used in motion or sit down as a normal receiver. That flexibility is gold, not just for Sherfield but for Vandy's young QB. Kyle Shurmur started five games last year as a true freshman, and though he is certainly the most promising signal-caller of the Mason era, his QBR was 17.3. Attention, C.J.: Shurmur needs playmakers to shoulder the load.

POSITION BATTLE Safety
Mason's D relies heavily on its safeties' ability to play both in the back end and in the box. With Andrew Williamson gone, junior Oren Burks needs help at the other spot. There's depth (Ryan White, Emmanuel Smith and Arnold Tarpley return), and frosh Joejuan Williams, Vandy's lone 2016 ESPN 300 prep, enrolled early and will vie for playing time from day one.

THE PRESSER

Webb seemed to pick up even more speed late in 2015, running for fewer than 99 yards just once in his last six games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY IT'S TOUGH TO DEFEND WEBB?** "He has really good feet, so he's in and out of breaks real well. He makes full-speed cuts, where most backs have to slow down to make a cut. In the hole or on the perimeter, he does a good job of one-cutting to get north and south and making a guy miss to take it the distance." —SEC defensive coach

Junior LB Zach Cunningham inserted himself alongside the SEC's marquee names with 103 tackles (one more than Bama's Reggie Ragland) and 16½ TFLs (three fewer than A&M's Myles Garrett) last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO GAME-PLAN FOR CUNNINGHAM?** "He's such an instinctive player at that position and has a great feel for the game. You may know where he's at, but how you're going to get to him becomes a whole different story. He tends to play a step ahead of where your guys are going." —SEC offensive coach

After taking over defensive duties in 2015, Mason oversaw improvements on all three units—and a jump to 5.2 ypp allowed, a respectable No. 33 in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MASON'S STAMP ON D?** "He's a little more multiple than Vanderbilt has been in the past. He plays both three down and four down, and he's a little more multiple in the back end as far as playing split-safety coverage and middle-of-the-field fire-zone coverage or middle-of-the-field closed coverage." —Power 5 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Kyle Shurmur**	So.	6-3	223	●
RB	**Ralph Webb**	Jr.	5-10	200	●
WR	**C.J. Duncan**	Jr.	5-11	203	●
WR	**Caleb Scott**	Jr.	6-1	198	●
WR	**Trent Sherfield**	Jr.	6-1	199	●
TE	**Nathan Marcus**	Jr.	6-5	242	
C	**Barrett Gouger**	Sr.	6-4	303	●
RG	**Bruno Reagan**	So.	6-3	316	
LG	**Delando Crooks**	Jr.	6-5	307	
RT	**Will Holden**	Sr.	6-6	312	●
LT	**Andrew Jelks**	Sr.	6-6	307	●
K	**Tommy Openshaw**	Jr.	6-2	188	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Jonathan Wynn**	Jr.	6-4	255	
DT	**Adam Butler**	Sr.	6-4	300	●
NG	**Nifae Lealao**	Jr.	6-5	317	●
OLB	**Josh Smith**	So.	6-4	238	
ILB	**Zach Cunningham**	Jr.	6-4	230	●
ILB	**Nigel Bowden**	Jr.	6-1	239	
LB/S	**Oren Burks**	Jr.	6-3	220	●
CB	**Tre Herndon**	Jr.	6-1	188	●
CB	**Torren McGaster**	Sr.	6-0	200	●
SS	**Arnold Tarpley**	Jr.	6-0	200	●
FS	**Emmanuel Smith**	Jr.	6-2	222	
P	**Sam Loy**	Fr.	6-1	185	●

277

Webb's 277 carries in 2015 set a Vandy record. In all, he had 56 percent of VU's rushes.

CHARLES MITCHELL/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.6 ● **FPI CHANCE VANDERBILT WINS**

9/1 vs. South Carolina **42%** ● **9/10** vs. Middle Tennessee **77%** ● **9/17** @ Georgia Tech **34%**
9/24 @ Western Kentucky **50%** ● **10/1** vs. Florida **29%** ● **10/8** @ Kentucky **42%**
10/15 @ Georgia **10%** ● **10/22** vs. Tennessee State **98%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ Auburn **19%**
11/12 @ Missouri **36%** ● **11/19** vs. Ole Miss **16%** ● **11/26** vs. Tennessee **11%**

1 LSU

COACH Les Miles (12th season)
112–32 (7–4 in bowl games)

Leave it to Les Miles to parlay a season in which he was very nearly fired in November into a No. 3-ranked recruiting class in February. Even with three new assistants and an underwhelming pool of quarterbacks for 2016, LSU is an SEC West front-runner thanks to one of the sport's superstars in Leonard Fournette. It's a win-big-or-else campaign in Baton Rouge. —David Ching

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–3 (5–3)
BOWL GAME AdvoCare V100 Texas Bowl vs. Texas Tech, 56-27 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Brandon Harris: 2,165 yards**
RUSHING **Leonard Fournette: 1,953 yards**
RECEIVING **Malachi Dupre: 698 yards**
TACKLES Deion Jones: 100
SACKS **Lewis Neal: 8**
INTERCEPTIONS **Jamal Adams: 4**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Leonard Fournette
He sputtered against Alabama last year, rushing 19 times for 31 yards after averaging 193.1 ypg in LSU's first seven contests, so his Heisman candidacy sputtered too. But there are few surer playmakers in college football than Fournette. Last year the junior led (or co-led) the nation in rush ypg (162.8), 10-plus-yard rushes (59), 200-yard rushing games (four) and games with at least three rushing TDs (four). It's no wonder Miles hands him the ball again and again ... and again. Fournette accounted for more than 37 percent of the Tigers' offensive yards in 2015.

X-FACTOR The linebackers
Former Wisconsin DC Dave Aranda and his attacking 3-4 base arrive in Baton Rouge for 2016. The Tigers will be transitioning from last year's 4-3, and Aranda's scheme, which draws up exotic blitzes from its linebackers, will ask more from the unit in 2016. Speedy defenders like seniors Kendell Beckwith (10 TFLs in 2015) and Duke Riley will help LSU's defensive ends attack the edges.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
For the third time in as many years, Brandon Harris will compete for QB1. (He served as backup in '14 before being named starter last year.) Harris, a junior, had a solid first half in 2015, playing to a 78.2 QBR through Week 7, only to throw three TDs and five picks in November. The dual-threat QB will face off against a dropback passer, Purdue transfer Danny Etling, to try to kick-start an aerial attack that ranked No. 105 in the FBS (180.4 ypg).

THE PRESSER

Fournette broke loose for a run of at least 40 yards in five games last year and tallied seven such carries on the season (T1 among Power 5 rushers). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO STOP HIM?** "Alabama had two guys touching him when he got to the line of scrimmage, which is key. You have to get more guys to him, which involves getting off blocks and having the talent to limit the space that he's in. Everybody else is praying they can hold the guy under 200 yards, and to them it was like, 'How many tackles for loss are we going to get?'" —SEC defensive coach

The Tigers claim a pair of deep-threat receivers in Malachi Dupre and Travin Dural (16.2 and 19.0 ypc in 2015, respectively), but Harris struggled to find them last year. He was held under 100 yards passing in four games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THE AERIAL ATTACK HASN'T TAKEN OFF?** "They don't ask (Harris) to make throws (to win games). Truth be told, if he could complete a pass consistently, they'd kill everybody, because receivers are running wide open on every play-action fake." —SEC defensive coach

LSU's D has inked 17 ESPN 300 preps in the front seven alone since 2013. That's 12 more blue chips than Wisconsin signed total in that time. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ARANDA'S INFLUX OF TALENT?** "He built defenses off of having big, stiff space eaters in a three-man front, then using the fourth guy, bringing him from different places to provide pass rush or disrupt the run. But he's never really had true pass rushers." —SEC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Brandon Harris**	Jr.	6-3	206 ●
RB	**Leonard Fournette**	Jr.	6-1	230 ●
WR	**Tyron Johnson**	So.	6-1	189
WR	**Travin Dural**	Sr.	6-2	203 ●
WR	**Malachi Dupre**	Jr.	6-3	190 ●
TE	**Colin Jeter**	Sr.	6-7	244 ●
C	**Ethan Pocic**	Sr.	6-7	309 ●
RG	**Josh Boutte**	Sr.	6-5	342
LG	**William Clapp**	So.	6-5	303 ●
RT	**Toby Weathersby**	So.	6-5	292
LT	**Maea Teuhema**	So.	6-5	327 ●
K	**Trent Domingue**	Sr.	6-2	170 ●
DEFENSE				
DE	**Lewis Neal**	Sr.	6-2	264 ●
DT	**Davon Godchaux**	Jr.	6-4	293 ●
DE	**Christian LaCouture**	Sr.	6-5	307 ●
OLB	**Arden Key**	So.	6-6	245 ●
ILB	**Duke Riley**	Sr.	6-0	227
ILB	**Kendell Beckwith**	Sr.	6-2	252 ●
OLB	**Tashawn Bower**	Sr.	6-5	240
CB	**Tre'Davious White**	Sr.	5-11	191 ●
CB	**Kevin Toliver II**	So.	6-2	196 ●
SS	**Jamal Adams**	Jr.	6-1	211 ●
FS	**Rickey Jefferson**	Sr.	6-0	206 ●
P	**Josh Growden**	RFr.	6-2	197

10

Adams' 10 passes defended led LSU last year, and his six pass breakups was second.

STACY REVERE/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.5 ● **FPI CHANCE LSU WINS**

9/3 vs. Wisconsin (Green Bay) **85%** ● **9/10** vs. Jacksonville State **99%**
9/17 vs. Mississippi State **87%** ● **9/24** @ Auburn **77%** ● **10/1** vs. Missouri **95%** ● **10/8** @ Florida **77%**
10/15 vs. Southern Miss **99%** ● **10/22** vs. Ole Miss **77%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Alabama **69%**
11/12 @ Arkansas **80%** ● **11/19** vs. South Alabama **99%** ● **11/24** @ Texas A&M **71%**

2 Alabama

COACH Nick Saban (10th season)
105–18* (7–3 in bowl games)

Nick Saban has led Alabama to rarefied air: For the Tide, every season is national championship or bust. So even with just 13 starters back, an SEC crown and a mere playoff appearance would be considered a letdown. Bama has won with inexperience before (three of Saban's four national titles have come with first-time starting QBs), so another new face under center? Old hat. —D.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 14–1 (7–1)
BOWL GAME CFP National Championship Game Presented by AT&T vs. Clemson, 45-40 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Jake Coker: 3,110 yards
RUSHING Derrick Henry: 2,219 yards
RECEIVING **Calvin Ridley: 1,045 yards**
TACKLES Reggie Ragland: 102
SACKS **Jonathan Allen: 12**
INTERCEPTIONS **Eddie Jackson: 6**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON S Eddie Jackson
Defensive lineman Jonathan Allen's decision to return to Tuscaloosa hogged the headlines (29 career TFLs), but Jackson, an All-SEC safety in his first year at the position, might be an even bigger save. The Tide lose DB mainstays Cyrus Jones and Geno Matias-Smith to graduation (30 combined starts last year alone), so Jackson's early exit would have left the secondary with a gaping void. Instead, the senior, whose 6 INTs in 2015 was the most from a Tide defender since 2010, will help take pressure off Alabama youngsters like Minkah Fitzpatrick and Marlon Humphrey.

X-FACTOR New DC Jeremy Pruitt
Other SEC programs made splashier hires (Bob Shoop to Tennessee, Dave Aranda to LSU), but bringing Pruitt back into the Alabama fold was a no-brainer for Saban. Pruitt cut his teeth in Tuscaloosa before moving on to direct defenses at Florida State (2013) and Georgia (2014-15), where his units ranked top 20 in the nation in scoring and ypg each year. Alabama has signed 34 ESPN 300 defensive prospects since '13, so he'll have plenty of talent to help ward off any drop-off from the Kirby Smart era.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Count the Tide as yet another SEC team with a question mark at QB. Junior Cooper Bateman lost the starting job to Jake Coker last season and this year must fend off redshirt freshman Blake Barnett and sophomore David Cornwell for the gig. No matter which pro-style passer gets tabbed, he'll be Lane Kiffin's third straight first-time starter in Tuscaloosa.

THE PRESSER

The Tide lose Derrick Henry, the SEC's single-season rushing leader, who accounted for 36 percent of their offense and 74 percent of their ground game. Still, Saban has fielded 1,000-yard runners in all but three years at Alabama. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHO'S UP NEXT?** "Bo Scarbrough's going to be good. He's an athlete, a big back. They're going to pop his [butt] out there and you're going to wonder, 'Where the hell did he come from?'" —SEC defensive coach

Kiffin guided RB-turned-QB Blake Sims to a school-record 3,487 pass yards in '14. Last year he coached first-time starter Coker to second on that list (3,110). He'll have to conjure QB voodoo again, with just 52 passes among the candidates (all from Bateman). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER KIFFIN CAN WORK MAGIC AGAIN?** "I think so. Lane knows how to utilize the talent he has and run the plays those guys can do. The games are slow motion for Lane Kiffin on the sideline. He's able to see the defense, call the play, help the guy." —SEC defensive coach

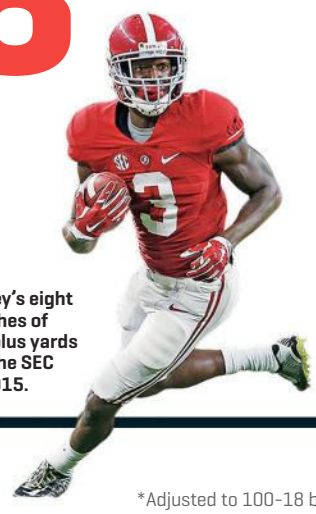
Bama throttles opposing QBs—its defensive QBR has ranked No. 1 in the FBS in three of the past five years. Still, dual threats (ahem Cam Newton, Johnny Manziel, Nick Marshall) can give the Tide fits. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW A DROPBACK QB CAN SUCCEED?** "I think Lane Kiffin and his offense could give Alabama's D some problems with a pro-style quarterback. You need to know what different checks to have at the line of scrimmage in order to attack it." —SEC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Cooper Bateman**	Jr.	6-3	224	
RB	**Damien Harris**	So.	5-11	214	
WR	**Calvin Ridley**	So.	6-1	188	●
WR	**Robert Foster**	Jr.	6-2	191	
WR	**ArDarius Stewart**	Jr.	6-1	204	●
TE	**O.J. Howard**	Sr.	6-6	242	●
C	**Ross Pierschbacher**	So.	6-4	304	●
RG	**Alphonse Taylor**	Sr.	6-5	345	●
LG	**Lester Cotton**	So.	6-4	319	
RT	**Jonah Williams**	Fr.	6-5	288	
LT	**Cam Robinson**	Jr.	6-6	327	●
K	**Adam Griffith**	Sr.	5-10	193	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Jonathan Allen**	Sr.	6-3	294	●
NG	**Dalvin Tomlinson**	Sr.	6-3	307	
DE	**Da'Shawn Hand**	Jr.	6-4	278	
OLB	**Tim Williams**	Sr.	6-4	237	
MLB	**Reuben Foster**	Sr.	6-1	240	●
WLB	**Rashaan Evans**	Jr.	6-3	230	
SLB	**Shaun Dion Hamilton**	Jr.	6-0	232	
CB	**Minkah Fitzpatrick**	So.	6-1	200	●
CB	**Marlon Humphrey**	So.	6-1	198	●
SS	**Eddie Jackson**	Sr.	6-0	194	●
FS	**Ronnie Harrison**	So.	6-3	216	
P	**JK Scott**	Jr.	6-5	198	●

8



Ridley's eight catches of 40-plus yards led the SEC in 2015.

TIM HEITMAN/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.8 ● **FPI CHANCE ALABAMA WINS**

9/3 vs. USC (Arlington, Texas) **62%** ● **9/10** vs. Western Kentucky **95%** ● **9/17** @ Ole Miss **51%**
9/24 vs. Kent State **99%** ● **10/1** vs. Kentucky **94%** ● **10/8** @ Arkansas **71%**
10/15 @ Tennessee **41%** ● **10/22** vs. Texas A&M **73%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ LSU **31%**
11/12 vs. Mississippi State **80%** ● **11/19** vs. Chattanooga **99%** ● **11/26** vs. Auburn **80%**

*Adjusted to 100-18 by NCAA

3 Ole Miss

COACH Hugh Freeze (5th season)
34–18 (3–1 in bowl games)

The Rebels' star-studded 2013 recruiting class—Laremy Tunsil, Robert Nkemdiche, Laquon Treadwell—came and left without an SEC title to its name. But on the heels of back-to-back New Year's Six bowl appearances, and with stud QB Chad Kelly back under center, Ole Miss is still trending up in the West. It just needs to get through September alive (Florida State, Bama, Georgia). —D.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Allstate Sugar Bowl vs. Oklahoma State, 48-20 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Chad Kelly: 4,042 yards**
RUSHING Jaylen Walton: 730 yards
RECEIVING Laquon Treadwell: 1,153 yards
TACKLES **DeMarquis Gates: 76**
SACKS **Marquis Haynes: 10**
INTERCEPTIONS Trae Elston: 4

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Chad Kelly
The senior is coming off one of the best seasons by a quarterback in SEC history—4,551 total yards, third most in the conference record books—and even with Treadwell NFL-bound, he'll have weapons aplenty in 2016. WRs Damore'ea Stringfellow and Quincy Adeboyejo and TE Evan Engram return, with 14 receiving TDs in 2015 among them. So don't look for Kelly's potent aerial attack, which racked up at least 350 yards in four games last year (most in the SEC), to be grounded any time soon.

X-FACTOR LB Rommel Mageo
Mageo's decision to take up residence in Oxford as a graduate transfer (Oregon State) is welcome news for the Rebels' D. The linebacker led the Beavers with 87 tackles last year, so he'll provide a critical, and immediate, boost to a linebacker unit that loses C.J. Johnson and Denzel Nkemdiche (18 starts and 96 tackles combined in '15) and that needs a playmaking complement to junior DeMarquis Gates.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
All five starters who lined up in the trenches for the Rebels' Sugar Bowl victory in January are gone. The arrival of five-star signee OT Gregory Little, the second-ranked prep in the 2016 ESPN 300, certainly helps, but potential starters Rod Taylor and Robert Conyers are the only Ole Miss veterans along the O-line (12 combined career starts). A handful of other linemen (Javon Patterson, Jordan Sims, Sean Rawlings) have some starting reps, but the front line is in major rebuilding mode.

THE PRESSER

Kelly broke or tied 14 single-season school records last year (4,042 pass yards, 31 TD passes) en route to an 87.0 QBR, the fourth-best mark in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW KELLY EXCELS?** "He was the best QB we played against last year. Hugh Freeze's offense is built around that quarterback—a guy who's mobile, can run the ball and whose passing game is excellent. You try to put too many people in the box and he runs those wheel routes." —SEC defensive coach

These Rebels are just not a ground-and-pound team, so even major turnover along the O-line shouldn't cripple an offense that rarely ran up the gut: 183 inside rushes in '15, tied for second fewest in the Power 5. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE O-LINE'S IMPACT?** "That offense is not predicated on linemen just dominating. It's a finesse offense, so if they just get in your way, the ball's away quick and they run the ball on the perimeter. It's not like they just line up in the I formation." —SEC defensive coach

The star power behind the Rebels' Landshark D—both Nkemdiches, Johnson, All-SEC DBs Trae Elston and Mike Hilton—are gone. A host of new starters will try to keep the Ole Miss defense, which ranked top 25 nationally in ypp in '14 and '15, from vanishing too. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LOSSES?** "Those guys affected the defense on the first level, second level, third level. When you lose that—not one but two and three of those guys—some of these young guys will have to step up." —SEC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Chad Kelly**	Sr.	6-2	215	●
RB	**Akeem Judd**	Sr.	5-11	222	
WR	**Markell Pack**	Jr.	6-2	193	
WR	**Quincy Adeboyejo**	Sr.	6-3	195	●
WR	**Damore'ea Stringfellow**	Jr.	6-2	220	
TE	**Evan Engram**	Sr.	6-3	235	●
C	**Robert Conyers**	Sr.	6-5	290	
RG	**Jordan Sims**	So.	6-4	334	
LG	**Javon Patterson**	So.	6-3	307	●
RT	**Sean Rawlings**	So.	6-5	280	●
LT	**Gregory Little**	Fr.	6-6	326	
K	**Gary Wunderlich**	Jr.	6-0	188	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Fadol Brown**	Sr.	6-4	280	●
DT	**Breeland Speaks**	So.	6-3	313	
NT	**Issac Gross**	Sr.	6-1	265	
DE	**Marquis Haynes**	Jr.	6-3	235	●
OLB	**DeMarquis Gates**	Jr.	6-2	226	
MLB	**Rommel Mageo**	Sr.	6-2	233	
OLB	**Tony Conner**	Sr.	6-0	215	●
CB	**Tony Bridges**	Sr.	6-0	183	●
CB	**Kendarius Webster**	Jr.	5-11	180	●
SS	**Deontay Anderson**	Fr.	6-1	212	
FS	**C.J. Hampton**	Jr.	6-1	205	
P	**Will Gleeson**	Jr.	6-3	197	●

21

Kelly's 21 TDs on 15-plus-yard throws tied him with Deshaun Watson for tops in the Power 5.

DERICK E. HINGLE/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.1 ● FPI CHANCE OLE MISS WINS

9/5 vs. Florida State (Orlando) **30%** ● **9/10** vs. Wofford **99%** ● **9/17** vs. Alabama **49%**
9/24 vs. Georgia **62%** ● **10/1** vs. Memphis **96%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** @ Arkansas **67%**
10/22 @ LSU **23%** ● **10/29** vs. Auburn **74%** ● **11/5** vs. Georgia Southern **95%**
11/12 @ Texas A&M **51%** ● **11/19** @ Vanderbilt **84%** ● **11/26** vs. Mississippi State **73%**

4 Texas A&M

COACH Kevin Sumlin (5th season)
36–16 (3–1 in bowl games)

Kevin Sumlin is drifting in the wrong direction: After capturing 11 wins in his debut 2012 season, he took two steps back with a 9-4 campaign in 2013, then stagnated at eight wins apiece in '14 and '15. This offseason he tabbed former UCLA OC Noel Mazzone to assume the same position in College Station, but instability at QB might hold back an abundance of talent at WR. —D.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (4–4)
BOWL GAME Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl vs. Louisville, 27-21 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Kyle Allen: 2,210 yards
RUSHING Tra Carson: 1,165 yards
RECEIVING **Christian Kirk: 1,009 yards**
TACKLES **Armani Watts: 126**
SACKS **Myles Garrett: 12½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Donovan Wilson: 5**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE Myles Garrett
The Aggies lay claim to one of the country's premier pass-rushing defensive ends in Garrett, who has piled up 24 sacks and 32½ TFLs in his two seasons in College Station. (His two dozen QB takedowns is tied for most in the FBS in that time.) And he has help. Senior Daeshon Hall added seven sacks and 14½ TFLs in 2015, joining Garrett to form one of the SEC's top pass-rushing combos. In all, the disruptive tandem helped Texas A&M to a defensive QBR of 30.3, which was top 15 in the nation last year.

X-FACTOR The offensive line
In February, Sumlin brought back Jim Turner for a second stint leading the Aggies' O-line, and he'll be entrusted with overhauling a thin, inexperienced unit. Texas A&M surrendered 2.9 sacks per game in 2015, tied for 107th in the nation, so Turner's ability to turn around a porous line might just be the key to the Aggies returning to form on offense. In its first year post-Johnny Manziel, A&M maintained a solid 6.3 ypp (No. 26 in the FBS) but flatlined in 2015 with 5.6 (No. 69).

POSITION BATTLE Running back
The quarterback saga in College Station is compelling, and certainly critical, but finding Tra Carson's heir apparent at running back will also be vital this fall. Carson was the first 1,000-yard rusher in the Sumlin era, and though the Aggies have a host of backfield options, the unit's leading veteran is now junior James White, who ran for just 196 yards last year. So look for Oklahoma transfer Keith Ford and three other backs to push for touches.

THE PRESSER

Thanks to College Station's mass QB exodus, which saw Kyle Allen and Kyler Murray transfer within a week of each other, the Aggies will hand the reins to Oklahoma graduate transfer Trevor Knight. He'll have a safety net: A&M returns its top five WRs from '15, including Christian Kirk and Josh Reynolds, who combined for 1,916 receiving yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW A&M MIGHT CLICK IN 2016?** "I think the biggest thing is being able to get on the same page. They weren't able to get the ball to their wideouts [last year]. They have guys who can make plays with the ball." —Power 5 defensive coach

Behind Garrett, the Aggies have accumulated 70 sacks since '14, tied for third most in the SEC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW YOU SIZE UP GARRETT?** "I don't think he's a No. 1 draft pick, but I think he'll be top 15, top 20. He's not a 3-4 guy who can stand up. He doesn't fit that Von Miller type. He's more of a hand-on-the-ground guy. He's a pass rusher. He's Simeon Rice." —SEC defensive coach

Last season, DC John Chavis' first, the A&M defense gave up 379.7 ypg, a year after allowing 450.8. All three levels return multiple starters. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER YOU EXPECT THE D TO TREND UP AGAIN?** "Any time you have turnover, it takes some adjustment, learning what the players can do. What's the way to get your best 11 players on the field? I think all of that goes into it, and usually your second year is going to be better than your first." —Power 5 defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Trevor Knight**	Sr.	6-1	215	
RB	**Keith Ford**	Jr.	5-11	220	
WR	**Speedy Noil**	Jr.	5-11	192	●
WR	**Christian Kirk**	So.	5-11	200	●
WR	**Josh Reynolds**	Sr.	6-4	190	●
WR	**Ricky Seals-Jones**	Jr.	6-5	240	●
C	**Erik McCoy**	RFr.	6-4	310	
RG	**Jermaine Eluemunor**	Sr.	6-4	320	
LG	**Keaton Sutherland**	So.	6-5	300	●
RT	**Koda Martin**	So.	6-6	300	
LT	**Avery Gennesy**	Sr.	6-5	310	●
K	**Daniel LaCamera**	So.	6-4	220	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Daeshon Hall**	Sr.	6-6	260	●
DT	**Zaycoven Henderson**	Jr.	6-1	300	
DT	**Daylon Mack**	So.	6-1	330	
DE	**Myles Garrett**	Jr.	6-5	262	●
LB	**Richard Moore**	So.	6-0	210	●
LB	**Claude George**	Sr.	6-2	230	
LB	**Shaan Washington**	Sr.	6-3	235	●
CB	**Priest Willis**	Jr.	6-2	200	●
CB	**Nick Harvey**	Jr.	5-10	180	
SS	**Armani Watts**	Jr.	5-11	200	●
FS	**Justin Evans**	Sr.	6-1	195	●
P	**Shane Tripucka**	Jr.	6-3	215	

24.4

Kirk averaged 24.4 yards per punt return, best in the FBS (minimum 10 returns).

KEN MURRAY/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● FPI CHANCE TEXAS A&M WINS

9/3 vs. UCLA **66%** ● **9/10** vs. Prairie View A&M **99%** ● **9/17** @ Auburn **48%**
9/24 vs. Arkansas (Arlington, Texas) **63%** ● **10/1** @ South Carolina **63%** ● **10/8** vs. Tennessee **41%**
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** @ Alabama **28%** ● **10/29** vs. New Mexico State **99%**
11/5 @ Mississippi State **49%** ● **11/12** vs. Ole Miss **49%** ● **11/19** vs. UTSA **99%** ● **11/24** vs. LSU **29%**

5 Mississippi State

COACH Dan Mullen (8th season)
55–35 (4–2 in bowl games)

The Bulldogs have not stayed home during bowl season since Dan Mullen's debut in 2009, the longest such stretch in program history. But now comes the hard part: replacing the best QB to ever wear maroon and white. Can Mississippi State reach the postseason in Year 1 A.D. (After Dak)? It'll need to find a ground game first—either in the backfield or under center. —D.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (4–4)
BOWL GAME Belk Bowl vs. NC State, 51-28 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Dak Prescott: 3,793 yards
RUSHING Dak Prescott: 588 yards
RECEIVING **Fred Ross: 1,007 yards**
TACKLES **Richie Brown: 109**
SACKS **Richie Brown: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Brandon Bryant: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Richie Brown
Even if the Bulldogs are down arguably the program's best player of all time (more on that below), they at least return a critical leader on defense in Brown. The senior never cracked the starting lineup until last season, his third, but he went on to lead the Bulldogs with 109 tackles—38 more than 2014's leading tackler. With Beniquez Brown leaving early for the draft and Zach Jackson's time in Starkville up, Brown will remain a centerpiece along Mississippi State's in-flux but still-solid front seven.

X-FACTOR DC Peter Sirmon
Sirmon is the latest to cycle through the Mississippi State revolving door of defensive coordinators and is Mullen's sixth coach to hold the spot in eight seasons. The first-time DC (he coached linebackers at Tennessee, Washington and USC) will mix in some 3-4 alignments with the Bulldogs' 4-3 base, including a new hybrid end/linebacker spot he calls "viper," which should leverage their wealth of defensive ends.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Dak Prescott owns every Mississippi State career passing record, so good luck to his successor. In the spring, Mullen rotated four QBs with the first team, all of whom are promising, if inexperienced. Sophomore Nick Fitzgerald went 11-of-14 for 235 yards and three TDs in eight games last year. Damian Williams and Elijah Staley: 75 career attempts combined. Nick Tiano? Freshman. As Mullen said, this one's wide open.

THE PRESSER

The team's 2015 leading passer *and* rusher, Prescott had a hand in a whopping 73 percent of Mississippi State's yards last year (4,381 total). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW MSU WILL HANDLE THAT HOLE IN PRODUCTION?** "He made them go. The biggest thing defending him was not letting him run between the tackles, so they'll need to find a QB to replace that. Now, here's what I will tell you about Danny [Mullen]: He's a good quarterback coach and he will find a guy. He may not be as talented, but I think that might help him a little bit because last year I think he depended on [Prescott] too much." —SEC defensive coach

Senior Brandon Holloway is the Bulldogs' top returning running back, but he managed just 413 yards last year for a meager ground game (144.1 ypg, No. 12 in the SEC). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHETHER THE RUN GAME IS A CONCERN WITHOUT A RUSHING QB?** "No, it's just like what Florida had with Tim Tebow. The thing that [Mullen] had at Florida with those offenses is he had the speed with the fly sweeps and all that stuff, but the quarterback has got to make it run. If not, you put eight guys in the box." —SEC defensive coach

Despite a new DC last year too, the Bulldogs' defense yielded similar—and in some cases, slightly better—results, compared with 2014: 391.2 ypg versus 424.4; 23.2 ppg versus 21.7. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE'S TRANSITION IN 2016?** "Dan's more heavily involved with that D than you think, so they're going to continue to run the same scheme. It's going to be a 4-3." —SEC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Nick Fitzgerald**	So.	6-5	227	
RB	**Brandon Holloway**	Sr.	5-8	165	●
WR	**Donald Gray**	Jr.	5-10	193	
WR	**Fred Ross**	Sr.	6-2	207	●
WR	**Malik Dear**	So.	5-9	220	
TE	**Dontea Jones**	Fr.	6-4	250	
C	**Jamaal Clayborn**	Sr.	6-4	315	●
RG	**Devon Desper**	Sr.	6-4	305	●
LG	**Deion Calhoun**	So.	6-3	303	
RT	**Justin Senior**	Sr.	6-5	295	●
LT	**Martinas Rankin**	Jr.	6-5	302	
K	**Westin Graves**	Jr.	6-0	163	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**A.J. Jefferson**	Sr.	6-3	277	●
DT	**Nick James**	Sr.	6-5	325	●
DE	**Johnathan Calvin**	Sr.	6-3	263	
OLB	**Will Coleman**	Sr.	6-5	250	
WLB	**Leo Lewis**	RFr.	6-2	240	
MLB	**Richie Brown**	Sr.	6-2	245	●
SLB	**J.T. Gray**	Jr.	6-0	196	
CB	**Tolando Cleveland**	Sr.	6-0	190	●
CB	**Cedric Jiles**	Sr.	5-10	180	
SS	**Brandon Bryant**	So.	5-11	205	●
FS	**Kivon Coman**	Sr.	6-3	196	●
P	**Logan Cooke**	Jr.	6-5	216	●

9.6

From Week 10 on in 2015, Ross averaged 9.6 catches per game, second most in the FBS.

JACOB KUPFERMAN/CSM/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3 ● **FPI CHANCE MISSISSIPPI STATE WINS**

9/3 vs. South Alabama **98%** ● **9/10** vs. South Carolina **72%** ● **9/17** @ LSU **13%**
9/24 @ Massachusetts (Foxborough) **97%** ● **10/1** BYE ● **10/8** vs. Auburn **62%**
10/14 @ BYU **62%** ● **10/22** @ Kentucky **70%** ● **10/29** vs. Samford **98%** ● **11/5** vs. Texas A&M **51%**
11/12 @ Alabama **20%** ● **11/19** vs. Arkansas **63%** ● **11/26** @ Ole Miss **27%**

6 Auburn

COACH Gus Malzahn (4th season)
27–13 (1–2 in bowl games)

Has the sheen worn off so quickly? After leading the Tigers to the final BCS championship game in his debut, Gus Malzahn has spiraled at Auburn, winning eight and seven games in 2014 and 2015, respectively. He enters 2016 with a potential mess at quarterback and a new coordinator in charge of a depleted D—so even a return to 10 wins looks unlikely, never mind a title shot. —D.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (2–6)
BOWL GAME Birmingham Bowl vs. Memphis, 31-10 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Sean White: 1,166 yards**
RUSHING Peyton Barber: 1,017 yards
RECEIVING Ricardo Louis: 716 yards
TACKLES **Johnathan Ford: 118**
SACKS Cassanova McKinzy: 5
INTERCEPTIONS **Carlton Davis: 3**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE Carl Lawson
Auburn's vaunted defensive end has missed 19 of 40 possible games since the start of his 2013 freshman season, so he put off the NFL for one more year to prove he can, in fact, stay healthy. When he is on the field—and 100 percent—Lawson is nearly unblockable. He rang up 7½ TFLs and forced two fumbles in 2013 but sat out all of 2014 with an ACL tear. In limited reps in 2015 (fractured hip), he collected 17 tackles and one sack. Lawson flat-out changes the complexion of the Tigers' pass rush, so his return this fall will be welcome: Auburn sacked opposing QBs 19 times last season (T101 in the FBS).

X-FACTOR LB Tre' Williams
All three starting linebackers from 2015 are gone (Kris Frost, Cassanova McKinzy, Justin Garrett: 593 combined tackles since 2012), so Williams returns to the Plains as the unit's most experienced Tiger. The departing starters predicted last year that Williams, who came up with 55 tackles and 4 TFLs in 2015, was ready to take over the D. He'll need to if Auburn has any hope of resurrecting a dormant rush defense. The Tigers allowed 4.5 ypc last year, 11th in the SEC.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Jeremy Johnson earned preseason Heisman chatter in 2015—then tossed 6 INTs in the Tigers' first three games. Sean White took over and wasn't much better, throwing for one TD in seven outings. The two are in the mix for starter again, with juco transfer John Franklin III bringing a dual-threat option.

THE PRESSER

Malzahn's offenses have succeeded with dual-threat QBs, but neither Johnson nor White proved dangerous as a runner last year (172 rush yards total, compared with Nick Marshall's 1,866 in 2013 and '14). The Tigers' production fell off a cliff, in turn, dropping from 485.0 ypg to 370.0 and 35.5 ppg to 27.5. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW MALZAHN CAN TURN IT AROUND IN 2016?** "They're going to have the play-action, but his passing game is very vanilla. It's not like defending other NFL-style offenses from that standpoint. So he's going to hang his hat on running the ball, and part of that is the QB running. When you take away that part of his offense, it really handcuffs him." —Power 5 defensive coach

Auburn poached new DC Kevin Steele from LSU in December. He has the unenviable task of shoring up leaky rush and pass D's—Auburn allowed 182.7 rush ypg *and* 222.5 pass ypg in '15, both 11th in the SEC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW STEELE WILL FIT?** "He's a Southern guy ... and they have good talent. I think he's going to be more 4-3, and that's Auburn's style." —SEC defensive coach

Lawson's return will be key for Auburn, which struggled to get off the field last year: Opponents converted 44.7 percent of third downs (T109 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LAWSON'S IMPACT?** "That's serious, having him back. He's a difference maker on third down. If you can get people to third-and-long, he can win. You have to put two people on him. With those other guys freed up, they can wind up winning." —SEC defensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**John Franklin III**	Jr.	6-1	174 ●
RB	**Jovon Robinson**	Sr.	6-0	230
HB	**Chandler Cox**	So.	6-1	232 ●
WR	**Nate Craig-Myers**	Fr.	6-2	205
WR	**Jason Smith**	Jr.	6-1	180
WR	**Marcus Davis**	Sr.	5-9	180 ●
C	**Xavier Dampeer**	Sr.	6-2	305
RG	**Braden Smith**	Jr.	6-6	286 ●
LG	**Alex Kozan**	Sr.	6-4	300 ●
RT	**Darius James**	Jr.	6-4	332
LT	**Austin Golson**	Jr.	6-5	304 ●
K	**Daniel Carlson**	Jr.	6-4	213 ●
DEFENSE				
DE	**Marlon Davidson**	Fr.	6-3	281
DT	**Dontavius Russell**	So.	6-3	295 ●
DT	**Montravius Adams**	Sr.	6-4	296 ●
DE	**Carl Lawson**	Jr.	6-2	257 ●
WLB	**Tre' Williams**	Jr.	6-2	238
MLB	**T.J. Neal**	Sr.	6-1	235
SLB	**Darrell Williams**	So.	6-2	234
CB	**Carlton Davis**	So.	6-1	190 ●
CB	**Jamel Dean**	RFr.	6-2	205
SS	**Johnathan Ford**	Sr.	6-0	203 ●
FS	**Tray Matthews**	Jr.	6-1	213 ●
P	**Kevin Phillips**	Sr.	6-0	185 ●

11

Playing in just six games last year, Lawson compiled 11 QB hurries, second most on the team.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.6 ● FPI CHANCE AUBURN WINS

9/3 vs. Clemson 28% ● **9/10** vs. Arkansas State 93% ● **9/17** vs. Texas A&M 52%
9/24 vs. LSU 23% ● **10/1** vs. UL Monroe 99% ● **10/8** @ Mississippi State 38%
10/15 BYE ● **10/22** vs. Arkansas 67% ● **10/29** @ Ole Miss 27% ● **11/5** vs. Vanderbilt 82%
11/12 @ Georgia 30% ● **11/19** vs. Alabama A&M 99% ● **11/26** @ Alabama 20%

7 Arkansas

COACH Bret Bielema (4th season)
18-20 (2-0 in bowl games)

The Razorbacks fielded one of the SEC's most dangerous offenses last year but must replace nearly every player who made them fearsome, including QB Brandon Allen, RB Alex Collins and TE Hunter Henry. After back-to-back years of rising win totals, Bret Bielema will be hard-pressed to keep pace in 2016—even with Arkansas' toughest tilts (Bama, Ole Miss, LSU) on home turf. —D.C.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (5-3)
BOWL GAME AutoZone Liberty Bowl vs. Kansas State, 45-23 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Brandon Allen: 3,440 yards
RUSHING Alex Collins: 1,577 yards
RECEIVING **Drew Morgan: 843 yards**
TACKLES **Brooks Ellis: 102**
SACKS **Deatrich Wise: 8**
INTERCEPTIONS **D.J. Dean: 2**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON TE Jeremy Sprinkle
Henry, who took home last season's John Mackey Award as the nation's best tight end, was Arkansas' second-leading receiver in each of the past three years. While his absence casts a long shadow, Sprinkle is well-versed in stepping out of it. Playing behind Henry last year, the senior caught six TDs—most among SEC tight ends. And though Sprinkle's 27 catches last season paled in comparison to Henry's 51 grabs, his 14.4 ypc was just about on par. All that to say: He looks primed to continue the Razorbacks' tradition of confounding D's with those pesky crossing routes.

X-FACTOR The running backs
Sophomore Rawleigh Williams III is coming back from a scary neck injury, former QB/WR Damon Mitchell is still learning the intricacies of the position and true freshmen Devwah Whaley and T.J. Hammonds are promising (2016 ESPN 300 preps) but unproven. That leaves senior Kody Walker to take on an expanded role after backing up Collins last year. Walker rushed for at least one TD in four of Arkansas' final seven games—production that will be critical for a team that ran the ball on 57.8 percent of its plays in '15 (No. 14 in the Power 5).

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
Allen's younger brother, Austin, will inherit the QB reins, but the question now is who will protect him. RT Dan Skipper and C Frank Ragnow return, but the Hogs are otherwise inexperienced. Among potential starters: redshirt freshman Colton Jackson and converted defensive lineman Hjalte Froholdt.

THE PRESSER

Arkansas and Bama were the only SEC teams to rush for more than 2,500 yards and pass for more than 3,400 in 2015. That productivity might be hard to match with a new QB and three new O-linemen. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ARKANSAS' OUTLOOK FOR 2016?** "[Allen] knew how to manage them and make good decisions. They're unproven right there. Getting good play this year at QB is the key." —SEC defensive coach

In this age of the spread, few teams use the tight end as prominently as Arkansas. The Hogs' TEs rang up 1,128 yards in '15, 162 more than any other team in the nation. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THEY ARE HARD TO REIN IN?** "I think that's the hardest offense right now to defend in the SEC because of the run game and the multiple blocking schemes they give you, and then all the crossing routes which are off blitzes and the way they hit the tight end." —SEC defensive coach

Last year the defense was up (116.5 rush ypg allowed, No. 12 in the FBS) and down (275.2 pass ypg allowed, No. 116). Nearly everyone on the two-deep returns, though. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHERE YOU SEE THE D'S STRENGTHS IN 2016?** "First of all, physically they're probably the biggest defensive front seven that we faced last year besides Alabama. They play a bend-but-don't-break style of defense, which is unique. As a coach, you see things on film that you think you can take advantage of, and as the game starts, you realize, 'Man, these guys are pretty good.'" —SEC offensive coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE				
QB	**Austin Allen**	Jr.	6-1	208
RB	**Rawleigh Williams III**	So.	5-10	224
WR	**Jared Cornelius**	Jr.	5-11	211 ●
WR	**Drew Morgan**	Sr.	6-0	195 ●
WR	**Dominique Reed**	Sr.	6-3	175 ●
TE	**Jeremy Sprinkle**	Sr.	6-6	255
C	**Frank Ragnow**	Jr.	6-5	314 ●
RG	**Brian Wallace**	So.	6-6	326
LG	**Hjalte Froholdt**	So.	6-4	309
RT	**Dan Skipper**	Sr.	6-10	326 ●
LT	**Colton Jackson**	RFr.	6-6	302
K	**Cole Hedlund**	So.	5-10	165 ●
DEFENSE				
DE	**Deatrich Wise Jr.**	Sr.	6-5	280 ●
DT	**Jeremiah Ledbetter**	Sr.	6-3	276 ●
DT	**Taiwan Johnson**	Sr.	6-2	287 ●
DE	**McTelviu Agim**	Fr.	6-3	288
LB	**Dre Greenlaw**	So.	6-0	231 ●
LB	**Brooks Ellis**	Sr.	6-2	248 ●
LB	**Khalia Hackett**	Jr.	6-2	215 ●
CB	**Henre' Toliver**	Jr.	6-1	181 ●
CB	**Jared Collins**	Sr.	5-11	172 ●
SS	**Santos Ramirez**	So.	6-2	201
FS	**Josh Liddell**	Jr.	6-1	210 ●
P	**Toby Baker**	Sr.	6-3	212 ●

77.8

Morgan caught 77.8 percent of his targets in 2015, first among Power 5 WRs (minimum 35 receptions).

MATTHEW EMMONS/USA TODAY SPORTS

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.5 ● FPI CHANCE ARKANSAS WINS

9/3 vs. Louisiana Tech **93%** ● **9/10** @ TCU **47%** ● **9/17** vs. Texas State **98%**
9/24 vs. Texas A&M (Arlington, Texas) **37%** ● **10/1** vs. Alcorn State **99%** ● **10/8** vs. Alabama **29%**
10/15 vs. Ole Miss **33%** ● **10/22** @ Auburn **33%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Florida **59%**
11/12 vs. LSU **20%** ● **11/19** @ Mississippi State **37%** ● **11/26** @ Missouri **63%**

1 Notre Dame

COACH Brian Kelly (7th season)
55–23 (3–3 in bowl games)

The Irish were 30 seconds (and a Stanford touchdown drive) from a potential playoff bid last season. They'll face a typically daunting schedule (nine bowl teams) but get a reprieve from ACC heavyweights Florida State and Clemson. If Notre Dame navigates its slate with one loss, another playoff shot might be in store—it just needs to name a QB first. —Jared Shanker

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3
BOWL GAME BattleFrog Fiesta Bowl vs. Ohio State, 44-28 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **DeShone Kizer: 2,884 yards**
RUSHING C.J. Prosise: 1,032 yards
RECEIVING Will Fuller: 1,258 yards
TACKLES Jaylon Smith: 114
SACKS Romeo Okwara: 8
INTERCEPTIONS KeiVarae Russell: 2

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Torii Hunter Jr.
There's no mistaking the name: Hunter's famous father (and namesake) is the five-time MLB All-Star. But the wideout hasn't yet established his own identity, totaling just 363 yards and two TDs last year as the fourth option behind Will Fuller, Chris Brown and Amir Carlisle. That trio (19 combined TDs) departs, so Hunter enters 2016 as Notre Dame's most established outside threat. The good news, considering his limited game reps (35 career catches), is that his three years in the system will make him familiar with the Irish QB—whoever he might be.

X-FACTOR LB Nyles Morgan
Morgan replaced an injured Joe Schmidt on the Irish roster in 2014, then played his way to 47 tackles and a freshman All-America nod. But he slid down the depth chart last year, contributing just 17 tackles. With Schmidt gone, Morgan again assumes the reins at middle linebacker, with very high expectations that he'll return to form. He'll be quarterbacking a D featuring several new faces and without one big one, Jaylon Smith, flanking him.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Brian Kelly should have picked Urban Meyer's brain at the Fiesta Bowl for tips on navigating a wealth of QBs. Malik Zaire emerged as an early Heisman dark horse in the 2015 opener (313 yards, three TDs, 0 INTs), then broke his ankle in Week 2. DeShone Kizer took over, registering a 79.7 QBR and 10 wins on the season. And, oh, don't sleep on sophomore Brandon Wimbush, a former ESPN 300 prep and perhaps the most highly touted among the three passers.

THE PRESSER

Zaire's sample size is small but impressive: In his two full games as the Irish starter, he played to an 88.0 QBR. He's a weapon on the ground too, averaging 41.4 rush yards in seven career outings. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ZAIRE AS A DUAL THREAT?** "I thought he was a freak. He's the real deal, man. He makes you hold your breath like Dalvin Cook when he's got the ball." —Power 5 head coach

The trenches weren't friendly to the Irish last season—on either side of the ball. They had just 25 sacks on defense (T74 in the FBS) while giving up 26 (T59). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NOTRE DAME'S FRONT LINES?** "I don't think they're built at the line of scrimmage to compete for a championship. I don't know if they're developed well enough or if they're tough enough. Notre Dame's perception is big, strong dudes—and they aren't." —Power 5 head coach

D-coordinator Brian VanGorder spent seven seasons in the NFL before making his way to South Bend in 2014 and insists his scheme is not too mentally taxing at the college level. But a talented Irish defense allowed 30-plus points in four games last year and gave up 20-plus yards on 63 plays (T81 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT VANGORDER?** "Schematically, he does more than double that of any of our other opponents. This is hard for us to prepare for, but it apparently is very hard for them to get right as well. Many of the big plays you saw against the 2015 defense on film were from missed assignments in the secondary." —Power 5 offensive coach

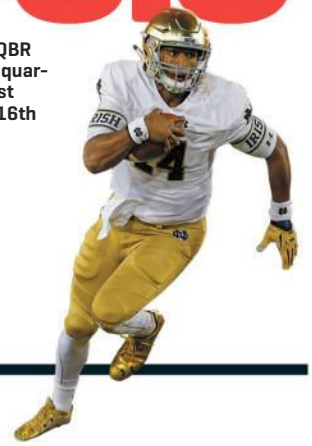
PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**DeShone Kizer**	So.	6-4	242	●
RB	**Tarean Folston**	Jr.	5-9	214	
WR	**Torii Hunter Jr.**	Jr.	6-0	195	
WR	**Equanimeous St. Brown**	So.	6-4	205	
WR	**Corey Robinson**	Sr.	6-4	215	
TE	**Alize Jones**	So.	6-4	240	●
C	**Sam Mustipher**	So.	6-2	305	
RG	**Hunter Bivin**	Jr.	6-5	306	
LG	**Quenton Nelson**	So.	6-4	335	●
RT	**Alex Bars**	So.	6-6	320	
LT	**Mike McGlinchey**	Jr.	6-7	315	●
K	**Justin Yoon**	So.	5-9	190	●
DEFENSE					
DE	**Andrew Trumbetti**	Jr.	6-3	260	
NT	**Jarron Jones**	Sr.	6-5	315	
DT	**Daniel Cage**	Jr.	6-0	315	●
DE	**Isaac Rochell**	Sr.	6-3	287	●
WLB	**Greer Martini**	Jr.	6-2	245	
MLB	**Nyles Morgan**	Jr.	6-0	245	
SLB	**James Onwualu**	Sr.	6-1	232	●
CB	**Nick Watkins**	Jr.	6-0	200	
CB	**Cole Luke**	Sr.	5-11	193	●
SS	**Max Redfield**	Sr.	6-1	205	●
FS	**Drue Tranquill**	So.	6-1	225	
P	**Tyler Newsome**	So.	6-2	210	●

78.0

Kizer's 78.0 QBR in the fourth quarter and OT last year ranked 16th in the FBS.



JED JACOBSOHN

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 9.0 ● FPI CHANCE NOTRE DAME WINS

9/4 @ Texas **54%** ● **9/10** vs. Nevada **96%** ● **9/17** vs. Michigan State **71%** ● **9/24** vs. Duke **88%**
10/1 vs. Syracuse (East Rutherford, N.J.) **85%** ● **10/8** @ NC State **67%** ● **10/15** vs. Stanford **67%**
10/22 BYE ● **10/29** vs. Miami (Fla.) **74%** ● **11/5** vs. Navy (Jacksonville, Fla.) **90%**
11/12 vs. Army (San Antonio) **95%** ● **11/19** vs. Virginia Tech **80%** ● **11/26** @ USC **29%**

2 BYU

COACH Kalani Sitake (1st season)

After 11 years and 99 wins in Provo, Bronco Mendenhall has moved on to Virginia. BYU alum Kalani Sitake takes the reins and inherits a wealth of QB toys, including übertalented, oft-injured Taysom Hill and 3,000-yard passer Tanner Mangum. The road to matching last year's nine wins is treacherous, though, with six Power 5 bowl teams in the first seven games. —Doug Mittler

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9-4
BOWL GAME Royal Purple Las Vegas Bowl vs. Utah, 35-28 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Tanner Mangum: 3,377 yards**
RUSHING **Algernon Brown: 709 yards**
RECEIVING Mitch Mathews: 737 yards
TACKLES Michael Wadsworth: 79
SACKS Bronson Kaufusi: 11
INTERCEPTIONS **Kai Nacua: 6**

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Jamaal Williams
After blowing out his right knee midway through 2014, then withdrawing from school last year for undisclosed reasons, Williams returns for his senior season to a rush attack in dire need of a boost—BYU ran for 128.3 ypg in 2015, No. 111 in the FBS. The Cougars have a potentially epic turnaround in store. The last time Williams and Hill were healthy at the same time *and* on the field for the bulk of the season? Way back in 2013, when BYU averaged 267.3 rush ypg, 10th best in the nation.

X-FACTOR New OC Ty Detmer
Sitake, a former Cougars fullback, turned to BYU royalty to helm the new-look offense. Detmer will bring back the LaVell Edwards pro-style attack, complete with a huddle—a departure from BYU's up-tempo attack of late. The lure of an NFL-like system is one reason Hill opted to stay in Provo rather than follow Mendenhall to Virginia. But the challenge will be to leverage Hill's running ability in a West Coast scheme. Working in Detmer's favor? Four returning starters on the O-line.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Hill garnered Heisman chatter before suffering a Lisfranc sprain in the 2015 opener, the third season-ending injury of his four-year BYU career. But when healthy, he's a force—2,212 rush yards, 24 rush TDs and 31 pass TDs in 25 career games—which makes the decision to return to last year's starter, Mangum, tricky. Mangum played well as a 22-year-old true freshman, throwing for 23 TDs and 7.6 ypa while going 8-4 in his starts.

THE PRESSER

When Hill was healthy for the duration of 2013, the Cougars averaged 30.2 ppg. That number actually rose to 33.8 in Hill's absence, with Mangum running the show in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHICH QB SCARES YOU MORE?** "Tanner is a good QB, and he runs good enough. He's a guy who can spin it. But Taysom is a different dude. He's scary in every way because he can run, throw—I'm not going to say Manziel, but he has that kind of knack for running around and making things happen." —Group of 5 head coach

The Cougars will hope for a reincarnation of Williams from 2013, when he recorded more than half of his rush yards (620) after first contact. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO STOP WILLIAMS?** "He's a physical, downhill guy. You have to control the line of scrimmage, and you're probably not going to do that by going one-on-one. You're going to have to get creative up front to create some angles in those gaps to win." —Group of 5 head coach

A defense in transition under new DC Ilaisa Tuiaki will benefit from the return of playmaking LB Fred Warner (11½ TFLs in 2015). But losing D-line stalwart Bronson Kaufusi (three forced fumbles last year) leaves a hole up front. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STANDOUTS ON D?** "Replacing Bronson will be tough. Travis Tuiloma (25 tackles in '15), the tackle who's coming back, is a stud. It will be interesting to see what they do at outside 'backer because that's such a big spot in their D. And Fred Warner is a really good player." —Group of 5 head coach

PHIL STEELE'S PROJECTED STARTERS

● Returner ● Overtaking returning starter

OFFENSE					
QB	**Taysom Hill**	Sr.	6-2	230	●
RB	**Jamaal Williams**	Sr.	6-2	220	●
WR	**Mitchell Juergens**	Sr.	5-10	181	●
WR	**Nick Kurtz**	Sr.	6-6	208	
WR	**Moroni Laulu-Pututau**	So.	6-4	211	
TE	**Tanner Balderree**	Jr.	6-3	248	
C	**Parker Dawe**	Sr.	6-3	301	●
RG	**Tuni Kanuch**	Jr.	6-3	325	●
LG	**Ului Lapuaho**	Jr.	6-7	333	●
RT	**Austin Hoyt**	So.	6-7	282	
LT	**Brad Wilcox**	Sr.	6-7	310	●
K	**James Baird**	Fr.	5-7	160	
DEFENSE					
DE	**Tomasi Laulile**	Jr.	6-4	288	
DT	**Travis Tuiloma**	Sr.	6-2	301	●
DT	**Logan Taele**	Sr.	6-2	299	●
WLB	**Sae Tautu**	Sr.	6-3	245	●
FLB	**Fred Warner**	Jr.	6-4	227	●
MLB	**Harvey Langi**	Sr.	6-3	249	●
SLB	**Francis Bernard**	So.	6-0	235	
CB	**Michael Davis**	Sr.	6-2	190	●
CB	**Troy Warner**	Fr.	6-1	192	
SS	**Micah Hannemann**	Jr.	6-0	200	●
FS	**Kai Nacua**	Sr.	6-2	208	●
P	**Jonny Linehan**	Sr.	6-0	201	●

929

Williams needs 929 yards to become BYU's all-time leading rusher (Harvey Unga, 3,455 yards).

BOYD IVEY/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.4 ● **FPI CHANCE BYU WINS**

9/3 vs. Arizona (Glendale, Ariz.) **36%** ● **9/10** @ Utah **33%** ● **9/17** vs. UCLA **34%**
9/24 vs. West Virginia (Landover, Md.) **23%** ● **9/30** vs. Toledo **83%** ● **10/8** @ Michigan State **28%**
10/14 vs. Mississippi State **38%** ● **10/20** @ Boise State **32%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ Cincinnati **60%**
11/12 vs. Southern Utah **95%** ● **11/19** vs. Massachusetts **97%** ● **11/26** vs. Utah State **80%**

3 Army

COACH Jeff Monken (3rd season)
6–18 (0–0 in bowl games)

Record aside, Army is improving: Seven losses came by a TD or less in 2015. Its 16 returning starters should help move some of those close calls to the win column. —D.M.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Andrew King
Army's top tackler was also its leading backfield terror. King compiled 16½ TFLs last year—10 more than any other Black Knight.

X-FACTOR WR Edgar Poe
Poe gives the triple-option a twist. He caught six TDs in 2015, triple his output from his previous two seasons combined. His three games with 95-plus yards was the most for a receiver at West Point since Jeremy Trimble in 2007.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Army employed three starters last year, two who return in 2016. Ahmad Bradshaw is the more powerful inside runner, while Chris Carter claims more pure speed and a quicker release.

THE PRESSER

Carter offers Army a passing dimension not normally seen at West Point. His 208 yards vs. Navy last year marked the first time in eight years the Knights threw for more yards than they ran. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT CARTER?** "He understands the triple-option completely. You have to change schematically; if you do too much of the same thing, they can book on you and make it a lot harder for you to stop." —Group of 5 head coach

For a team typically known for ball possession, last year was a headache: minus-11 TO margin, tied for 113th in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ARMY'S 22 TOs?** "Part of their struggles, I think, was that they were on a bunch of short fields." —Group of 5 head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2–10
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Ahmad Bradshaw: 429 yards**
RUSHING **Aaron Kemper: 544 yards**
RECEIVING **Edgar Poe: 441 yards**
TACKLES **Andrew King: 92**
INTERCEPTIONS **Brandon Jackson: 3**
SACKS **Andrew King: 4½**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0
FPI CHANCE ARMY WINS

9/2 @ Temple 19% ● **9/10** vs. Rice 74% ● **9/17** @ UTEP 61% ● **9/24** @ Buffalo 55% ● **10/1** BYE ● **10/8** @ Duke 18% ● **10/15** vs. Lafayette 97% ● **10/22** vs. North Texas 85% ● **10/29** @ Wake Forest 14% ● **11/5** vs. Air Force 36% ● **11/12** vs. Notre Dame (San Antonio) 5% ● **11/19** vs. Morgan State 97% ● **12/10** vs. Navy (Baltimore) 35%

4 Massachusetts

COACH Mark Whipple (3rd season)
6–18 (0–0 in bowl games)

Mark Whipple's three wins landed the 2015 Minutemen in the MAC East basement. With a trio of SEC foes in 2016, life as an FBS independent won't be any easier. —D.M.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Marquis Young
On a team lacking firepower (22.2 ppg in '15, No. 108 in the FBS), Young offered glimpses of big-strike ability. Three of his seven TDs came on runs of 47, 50 and 83 yards.

X-FACTOR S Khary Bailey-Smith
Before his season-ending knee injury in September, Bailey-Smith logged 21 tackles in two games. His return will boost a pass D that gave up 254.9 ypg last year (T96 in the FBS).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Ross Comis excelled in mop-up duty (8-for-8 for 69 yards vs. Notre Dame), but three-star transfer Andrew Ford (VaTech via Lackawanna College) is a pro-style QB who fits the system.

THE PRESSER

Young averaged a very respectable 6.3 ypc in 2015 (No. 35 in the FBS) and ran for 10-plus yards 31 times. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO BOTTLE UP YOUNG?** "You need to force him to run between the tackles—keep the edges contained. He likes to bounce everything outside and use his speed." —Group of 5 defensive coach

Helping Young's cause will be four returning O-linemen, including Fabian Hoeller, who started all 12 games at left guard last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE O-LINE?** "Coach Whipple is very creative with the use of six offensive linemen and creating alignment issues and gap-responsibility issues." —Group of 5 head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Blake Frohnapfel: 2,919 yards
RUSHING **Marquis Young: 960 yards**
RECEIVING Tajae Sharpe: 1,319 yards
TACKLES Jovan Santos-Knox: 131
INTERCEPTIONS Trey Dudley-Giles: 4
SACKS Kassan Messiah: 4

SCHEDULE

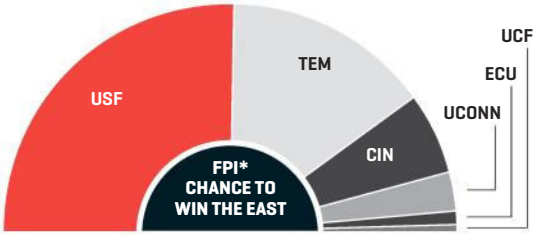
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 2.7
FPI CHANCE MASSACHUSETTS WINS

9/3 @ Florida 1% ● **9/10** vs. Boston College (Foxborough) 8% ● **9/17** vs. Florida International 43% ● **9/24** vs. Mississippi State (Foxborough) 3% ● **10/1** vs. Tulane (Foxborough) 38% ● **10/8** @ Old Dominion 24% ● **10/15** vs. Louisiana Tech (Foxborough) 27% ● **10/22** @ South Carolina 2% ● **10/29** vs. Wagner 95% ● **11/5** @ Troy 13% ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** @ BYU 3% ● **11/26** @ Hawaii 17%

FPI

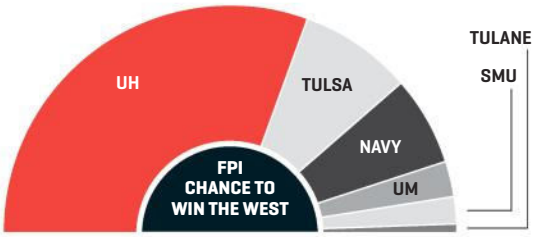
AAC outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
SOUTH FLORIDA	44	51.0%
TEMPLE	63	29.1%
CINCINNATI	70	12.2%
CONNECTICUT	84	5.5%
EAST CAROLINA	94	1.7%
CENTRAL FLORIDA	100	0.6%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
HOUSTON	48	61.4%
TULSA	78	16.1%
NAVY	82	12.6%
MEMPHIS	85	5.2%
SMU	91	4.1%
TULANE	106	0.6%



AVERAGE FPI RANK

78.8

PROJECTED CHAMPION

35%

SOUTH FLORIDA

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB	**Greg Ward Jr.**	Sr.	Houston

ALL-AAC

QB	**Greg Ward Jr.**	Sr.	Houston
RB	**Marlon Mack**	Jr.	South Florida
RB	**Jahad Thomas**	Sr.	Temple
WR	**Zay Jones**	Sr.	East Carolina
WR	**Keevan Lucas**	Sr.	Tulsa
TE	**Alec Bloom**	Jr.	Connecticut
OL	**Will Noble**	So.	Houston
OL	**Ryan Leahy**	Sr.	Cincinnati
OL	**J.T. Boyd**	Sr.	East Carolina
OL	**Dion Dawkins**	Sr.	Temple
OL	**Kofi Amichia**	Sr.	South Florida

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

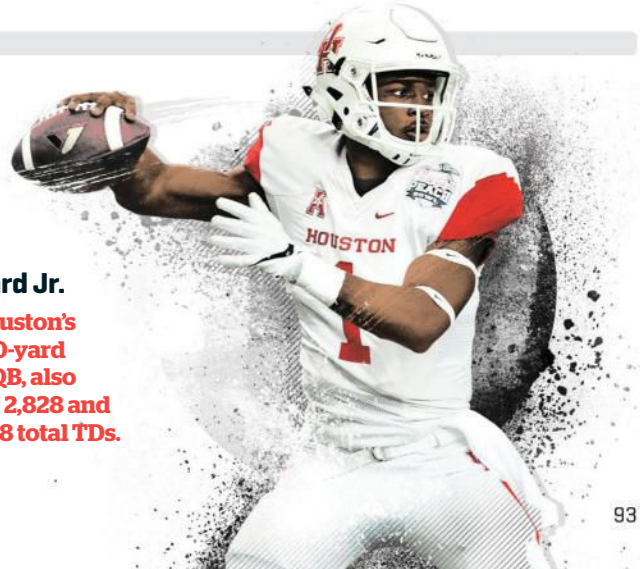
LB	**Steven Taylor**	Sr.	Houston

ALL-AAC

DL	**Haason Reddick**	Sr.	Temple
DL	**Folorunso Fatukasi**	Jr.	Connecticut
DL	**Tanzel Smart**	Sr.	Tulane
DL	**Demetri McGill**	Sr.	East Carolina
LB	**Nico Marley**	Sr.	Tulane
LB	**Steven Taylor**	Sr.	Houston
LB	**Auggie Sanchez**	Jr.	South Florida
CB	**Jamar Summers**	Jr.	Connecticut
CB	**Deatrick Nichols**	Jr.	South Florida
S	**Zach Edwards**	Sr.	Cincinnati
S	**Travon Simmons**	Jr.	East Carolina

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Jake Elliott**	Sr.	Memphis
P	**Spencer Smith**	Jr.	Memphis
RS	**Rodney Adams**	Sr.	South Florida



Greg Ward Jr.

Ward, Houston's first 1,000-yard rushing QB, also threw for 2,828 and rang up 38 total TDs.

SCOTT CUNNINGHAM/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 South Florida

COACH Willie Taggart (4th season)
14–23 (0–1 in bowl games)

With 15 starters back and a dynamic backfield led by RB Marlon Mack and QB Quinton Flowers, USF is favored in all but a game vs. its rival in Tallahassee. —Gus Elvin

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Marlon Mack
Mack, a 6-foot, 205-pound junior, ran for a school-record 1,381 yards last year and led the conference in rushing, averaging 6.6 yards a carry with 13 runs of more than 20 yards.

X-FACTOR WR Rodney Adams
Adams led the Bulls in receptions (45) and yards (822) and tied for the conference lead in TD receptions with nine, including four of 50-plus yards.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
With three vets gone who combined for 79 starts, Jeremi Hall and Cameron Ruff will compete at left guard, while Reilly Gibbons and juco transfer Glen Bethel will battle at right tackle.

THE PRESSER

Flowers and Mack combined for almost 2,400 yards rushing and 20 TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE ONE-TWO PUNCH?** "They do a lot of things out of the option and the zone read. They make you pick your poison on defense." —AAC head coach

Deatrick Nichols led the team in interceptions (four) and forced fumbles (two) and also recorded 8½ tackles for loss. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NICHOLS?** "They attack the football and play with a lot of speed, effort and aggression, and Nichols is a defensive back with a lot of confidence. He isn't just an interception guy either. He's a player who makes plays at each level." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8-5 (6-2)
BOWL GAME Miami Beach Bowl vs. Western Kentucky, 45-35 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Quinton Flowers: 2,296 yards**
RUSHING **Marlon Mack: 1,381 yards**
RECEIVING **Rodney Adams: 822 yards**
TACKLES **Auggie Sanchez: 117**
SACKS Eric Lee: 5
INTERCEPTIONS **Deatrick Nichols: 4**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.7
FPI CHANCE SOUTH FLORIDA WINS

9/3 vs. Towson **97%** ● **9/10** vs. Northern Illinois **80%** ● **9/17** @ Syracuse **52%** ● **9/24** vs. Florida State **11%** ● **10/1** @ Cincinnati **57%** ● **10/8** vs. East Carolina **87%** ● **10/15** vs. Connecticut **82%** ● **10/21** @ Temple **54%** ● **10/28** vs. Navy **81%** ● **11/5** BYE ● **11/12** @ Memphis **73%** ● **11/19** @ SMU **73%** ● **11/26** vs. Central Florida **90%**

2 Temple

COACH Matt Rhule (4th season)
18–20 (0–1 in bowl games)

After winning 10 games for just the second time in its history, Temple looks to build on last season's success with six returning starters on each side of the ball. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB P.J. Walker
Walker, a senior with 33 starts, holds school records for TD passes (52) and total offense (8,237 yards), and with 7,374 passing yards, he's 121 short of the school record.

X-FACTOR MLB Jarred Alwan
Alwan had 74 tackles and four forced fumbles last season. He'll be counted on to help replace Bednarik Award winner Tyler Matakevich.

POSITION BATTLE Safety
Delvon Randall should slide into the starting spot vacated by All-AAC safety Alex Wells; the question is who will earn the other starting safety position, Khiry Lucas or Nate L. Smith.

THE PRESSER

Temple is old-school and runs between the tackles, and the Owls were in the top two in the AAC in run, pass, scoring and total defense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THIS TEAM'S IDENTITY?** "They are one of the most hard-nosed, physical football teams we have played. They like to run the ball, and their quarterback and running back run downhill effectively." —AAC head coach

Over the past three years, Temple has gradually improved from two wins to six to 10 last season. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TEMPLE'S EMERGENCE UNDER MATT RHULE?** "He has done an unbelievable job rebuilding that program. Matt really preached, sold and changed the culture there." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–4 (7–1)
BOWL GAME Marmot Boca Raton Bowl vs. Toledo, 32-17 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **P.J. Walker: 2,973 yards**
RUSHING **Jahad Thomas: 1,262 yards**
RECEIVING Robby Anderson: 939 yards
TACKLES Tyler Matakevich: 138
SACKS Nate D. Smith: 7
INTERCEPTIONS Tyler Matakevich: 5

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.3
FPI CHANCE TEMPLE WINS

9/2 vs. Army **81%** ● **9/10** vs. Stony Brook **97%** ● **9/17** @ Penn State **21%** ● **9/24** vs. Charlotte **94%** ● **10/1** vs. Southern Methodist **78%** ● **10/6** @ Memphis **55%** ● **10/15** @ Central Florida **71%** ● **10/21** vs. South Florida **46%** ● **10/29** vs. Cincinnati **62%** ● **11/4** @ Connecticut **55%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** @ Tulane **77%** ● **11/26** vs. East Carolina **76%**

3 Cincinnati

COACH Tommy Tuberville (4th season)
25–14 (0–3 in bowl games)

The Bearcats return eight starters on D but need steadier hands at QB (22 interceptions) to open things up for big-play RBs Mike Boone and Tion Green. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Mike Boone
The 5-foot-11, 201-pound Boone (7.2 yards per carry) will be the featured back this season and could be a breakout player as the Bearcats try to recommit to a running game.

X-FACTOR WR Devin Gray
The Bearcats lost six receivers who each had more than 450 yards last season. Gray caught 69 balls for 1,154 yards and 11 TDs last year at Sierra College in California.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Senior Gunner Kiel (23 starts in two years) continues to be pushed by sophomore Hayden Moore (eight games) in hopes of reducing the team's disastrous 33 turnovers (T124 in the BCS).

THE PRESSER

Boone had 104 carries for 749 yards and nine TDs last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT BOONE?** "He's a bigger back and a very powerful runner who is very difficult to bring down. You have to hit him before he gets his momentum going and tackle him well with multiple guys." —AAC head coach

Safety Zach Edwards was Cincinnati's best player on defense a year ago with 93 tackles, three interceptions and eight passes broken up. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT EDWARDS?** "He is smart, seemingly always in good position and not one to shy away from contact. He makes plays at all three levels and is a ball hawk for them in the secondary." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (4–4)
BOWL GAME Sheraton Hawaii Bowl vs. San Diego State, 42–7 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Gunner Kiel: 2,777 yards**
RUSHING Hosey Williams: 777 yards
RECEIVING Shaq Washington: 982 yards
TACKLES **Eric Wilson: 106**
SACKS Silverberry Mouhon: 4½
INTERCEPTIONS **Zach Edwards: 3**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.0
FPI CHANCE CINCINNATI WINS

9/1 vs. UT Martin **94%** • **9/10** @ Purdue **41%** • **9/15** vs. Houston **45%** • **9/24** vs. Miami (Ohio) **86%** • **10/1** vs. South Florida **43%** • **10/8** @ Connecticut **49%** • **10/15** BYE • **10/22** vs. East Carolina **79%** • **10/29** @ Temple **38%** • **11/5** vs. BYU **40%** • **11/12** @ Central Florida **65%** • **11/18** vs. Memphis **70%** • **11/25** @ Tulsa **46%**

4 Connecticut

COACH Bob Diaco (3rd season)
8–17 (0–1 in bowl games)

Dual-threat QB Bryant Shirreffs runs an offense that returns 10 starters, its top five receivers and its top three rushers. The opportunistic D? A bit more turnover. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Arkeel Newsome
Newsome, a 5-foot-7, 180-pound junior, led the AAC with 1,686 all-purpose yards as a sophomore, including two 100-yard rushing performances in the Huskies' final five games.

X-FACTOR CB Jamar Summers
The junior collected 8 INTs (T2 in the FBS) and 39 tackles for a pass defense that led the AAC and was ranked 20th nationally, allowing just 189.3 passing yards per game.

POSITION BATTLE Outside linebacker
Junior Vontae Diggs, senior Omaine Stephens and redshirt freshman Nazir Williams are battling it out for the only open linebacker spot in Bob Diaco's 3-4 scheme.

THE PRESSER

Newsome was UConn's leading rusher (792 yards), its second-leading receiver (465 yards) and its top kick returner (429 yards). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NEWSOME?** "He has great vision and runs hard and physically despite not being very big. He is a complete back, and he also has such great hands." —AAC head coach

The Huskies' pass defense was tied for 12th nationally with 18 interceptions (4.5 percent of opponents' attempts, eighth in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR PASS D?** "They are assignment-sound and often drop all four of their linebackers into coverage. It's very hard to find windows to throw into when eight guys drop." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 (4–4)
BOWL GAME St. Petersburg Bowl vs. Marshall, 16-10 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Bryant Shirreffs: 2,078 yards**
RUSHING **Arkeel Newsome: 792 yards**
RECEIVING **Noel Thomas: 719 yards**
TACKLES Andrew Adams: 103
SACKS **Folorunso Fatukasi: 7½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Jamar Summers: 8**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0
FPI CHANCE CONNECTICUT WINS

9/1 vs. Maine **95%** • **9/10** @ Navy **42%** • **9/17** vs. Virginia **46%** • **9/24** vs. Syracuse **45%** • **9/29** @ Houston **18%** • **10/8** vs. Cincinnati **51%** • **10/15** @ South Florida **18%** • **10/22** vs. Central Florida **77%** • **10/29** @ East Carolina **52%** • **11/4** vs. Temple **45%** • **11/12** BYE • **11/19** @ Boston College **26%** • **11/26** vs. Tulane **80%**

5 East Carolina

COACH Scottie Montgomery (1st season)

After a 5-7 season marred by key injuries and offensive struggles, ECU hired former Duke OC Scottie Montgomery, who inherits an athletic roster. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Zay Jones
One of the top returning receivers in the nation, the senior hauled in 98 passes for 1,099 yards and five touchdowns last season.

X-FACTOR OLB Yiannis Bowden
The 6-foot-5, 225-pound sophomore registered 3½ sacks and an interception and is expected to be an impact player off the edge.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Kurt Benkert's transfer to UVa put a likely end to the QB question—enter Philip Nelson, a transfer himself via Minnesota—so the focus shifts to RB. Junior Anthony Scott is the vet but had only 49 carries in '15; expect reps for soph Shawn Furlow and Tennessee transfer Derrell Scott.

THE PRESSER

At Duke, Montgomery ran balanced offenses with mobile QBs like Thomas Sirk (803 yards rushing in 2015). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MONTGOMERY'S STYLE?** "I can tell you right now that ECU will be well-coached on offense. ECU isn't a rebuild either, as they have a lot of good players returning at the skill positions." —AAC head coach

The Pirates ranked in the top half of the AAC in sacks with 25. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT ECU'S DEFENSIVE FRONT?** "Defensive line is one area where they have stood out the last few years. They're not only big, strong and athletic, but they play hard. They have more than three or four guys who get after it up there." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Blake Kemp: 2,658 yards
RUSHING Chris Hairston: 754 yards
RECEIVING **Zay Jones: 1,099 yards**
TACKLES Zeek Bigger: 98
SACKS Montese Overton: 7½
INTERCEPTIONS Josh Hawkins: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4
FPI CHANCE EAST CAROLINA WINS

9/3 vs. Western Carolina **91%** • **9/10** vs. NC State **20%** • **9/17** @ South Carolina **10%** • **9/24** @ Virginia Tech **11%** • **10/1** vs. Central Florida **67%** • **10/8** @ South Florida **13%** • **10/13** vs. Navy **46%** • **10/22** @ Cincinnati **21%** • **10/29** vs. Connecticut **48%** • **11/5** @ Tulsa **26%** • **11/12** vs. Southern Methodist **58%** • **11/19** BYE • **11/26** @ Temple **24%**

6 Central Florida

COACH Scott Frost (1st season)

The winless Knights ranked near the bottom nationally in most key categories. Can Scott Frost blow things up with the explosive offense he brings from Oregon? —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Tre'Quan Smith
The 2015 AAC freshman of the year, Smith led the Knights in receptions (52), receiving yards (724) and receiving TDs (four) and was one of the team's few bright spots.

X-FACTOR RB Taj McGowan
McGowan, a sophomore, ran for just 262 yards last year, but at 6-foot-1, 198 pounds, he has breakaway speed that suits Frost's offense.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Senior Justin Holman started 21 games over the past two seasons and in 2014 threw for nearly 3,000 yards with 23 TDs. Senior Nick Patti has played WR and QB in a wildcat role but has thrown just 22 passes in two seasons.

THE PRESSER

Oregon played fast, ranking eighth nationally with just 21.4 seconds per offensive snap. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FROST'S PLAY-CALLING TEMPO?** "Playing an offense like that presents many challenges, as you need to be well-conditioned, simple in your schemes and playcalls. The simpler the game plan and more guys you can rotate in, the better." —AAC head coach

Jamiyus Pittman, a 300-pound defensive tackle, led the team in sacks (4½) and anchored the run defense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT JAMIYUS PITTMAN?** "That is one strong kid in the middle of that defense. What makes him special is the pad level, leverage and motor he plays with." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 0–12 (0–8)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Justin Holman: 1,379 yards**
RUSHING **C.J. Jones: 339 yards**
RECEIVING **Tre'Quan Smith: 724 yards**
TACKLES Domenic Spencer: 104
SACKS **Jamiyus Pittman: 4½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Shaquill Griffin: 2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.2
FPI CHANCE CENTRAL FLORIDA WINS

9/3 vs. South Carolina State **92%** • **9/10** @ Michigan **3%** • **9/17** vs. Maryland **34%** • **9/24** @ Florida International **52%** • **10/1** @ East Carolina **33%** • **10/7** vs. Tulane **63%** • **10/15** vs. Temple **29%** • **10/22** @ Connecticut **23%** • **10/29** @ Houston **10%** • **11/5** BYE • **11/12** vs. Cincinnati **35%** • **11/19** vs. Tulsa **37%** • **11/26** @ South Florida **10%**

1 Houston

COACH Tom Herman (2nd season)
13–1 (1–0 in bowl games)

Tom Herman won a conference title and the Peach Bowl in his debut season. This year he has to replace six starters on O, but star QB Greg Ward Jr. returns. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Greg Ward Jr.
Ward ranked second in the nation in both rushing yards (1,108) and rushing touchdowns (21) by a quarterback. He also led the AAC with a Total QBR of 80.3.

X-FACTOR RB Duke Catalon
Catalon, a 6-foot, 210-pound transfer from Texas and former four-star recruit out of Houston, gave the scout team fits last year as a redshirt freshman, Herman says.

POSITION BATTLE Cornerback
Brandon Wilson, Jesse Winchester and J.J. Dallas are fighting for a starting job at cornerback, part of a secondary that lost three all-conference players from last year.

THE PRESSER

Ward accounted for 3,936 yards and 38 touchdowns last season, ranking third in the conference in total yards and first in TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WARD?** "Ward is a great, great player. I think he was the toughest guy to defend in the conference. His legs can be the difference in a game." —AAC head coach

Last season Houston led the nation with 35 takeaways, racking up 21 interceptions and forcing 14 fumbles. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOUSTON'S DEFENSE?** "[Defensive coordinator Todd] Orlando is a great coach. It's obvious that [turnovers are] an emphasis of theirs because they are all over the place on defense." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 13–1 (7–1)
BOWL GAME Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl vs. Florida State, 38-24 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Greg Ward Jr.: 2,828 yards**
RUSHING **Greg Ward Jr.: 1,108 yards**
RECEIVING Demarcus Ayers: 1,222 yards
TACKLES Elandon Roberts: 142
SACKS **Steven Taylor: 10**
INTERCEPTIONS William Jackson III: 5

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.5
FPI CHANCE HOUSTON WINS

9/3 vs. Oklahoma (NRG Stadium, Houston) **9%** • **9/10** vs. Lamar **98%** • **9/15** @ Cincinnati **55%** • **9/24** @ Texas State **93%** • **9/29** vs. Connecticut **82%** • **10/8** @ Navy **63%** • **10/15** vs. Tulsa **76%** • **10/22** @ SMU **70%** • **10/29** vs. Central Florida **90%** • **11/5** BYE • **11/12** vs. Tulane **91%** • **11/17** vs. Louisville **28%** • **11/25** @ Memphis **68%**

2 Tulsa

COACH Philip Montgomery (2nd season)
6–7 (0–1 in bowl games)

Tulsa averaged 507 yards of total offense (No. 13 in the FBS), and with senior QB Dane Evans back for more, the Golden Hurricane look bowl-worthy once again. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Dane Evans
The 6-foot-1, 210-pound senior threw 25 TDs and completed 63 percent of his passes with just eight picks. He threw for 427 yards and four TDs with no interceptions at Oklahoma.

X-FACTOR WR Keevan Lucas
Lucas suffered a season-ending knee injury in Tulsa's fourth game but led the Golden Hurricane in 2014 with 101 catches for 1,219 yards and 11 touchdowns.

POSITION BATTLE Guard
Tulsa will be young on the offensive line with redshirt freshman Tristan Wyatt, sophomore Tyler Bowling and juco transfer Deya Mhiesen trying to fill both guard spots.

THE PRESSER

Tulsa ranked 11th in passing offense (333.2 ypg) and tied for seventh nationally with 69 passing plays of 20 or more yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT TULSA'S OFFENSE?** "Montgomery is well-respected. His tempo and his willingness to take the top off the defense vertically is tough to defend. Evans can stretch the field." —AAC head coach

Opponents liked to attack the Golden Hurricane's 117th-ranked run defense (239.7 ypg). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RUNNING ON THEM?** "Tulsa is a team that likes to get in offensive shootouts, and by running the ball and avoiding quick possessions, you allow your defense time to rest and keep their explosive offense on the sideline." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 (3–5)
BOWL GAME Camping World Independence Bowl vs. Virginia Tech, 55-52 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Dane Evans: 4,332 yards**
RUSHING **D'Angelo Brewer: 837 yards**
RECEIVING Keyarris Garrett: 1,588 yards
TACKLES Michael Mudoh: 135
SACKS **Matt Linscott: 5**
INTERCEPTIONS **Jeremy Brady: 2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.9
FPI CHANCE TULSA WINS

9/3 vs. San Jose State **61%** • **9/10** @ Ohio State **8%** • **9/17** vs. North Carolina A&T **95%** • **9/24** @ Fresno State **65%** • **10/1** BYE • **10/7** vs. SMU **73%** • **10/15** @ Houston **24%** • **10/22** vs. Tulane **82%** • **10/29** @ Memphis **49%** • **11/5** vs. East Carolina **74%** • **11/12** @ Navy **43%** • **11/19** @ Central Florida **63%** • **11/25** vs. Cincinnati **54%**

3 Navy

COACH Ken Niumatalolo (10th season)
68–37 (4–4 in bowl games)

Ken Niumatalolo coached Navy to 11 wins, a first in program history. This year his vaunted triple-option attack has a new captain: Tago Smith. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Tago Smith
Smith, a senior, has to follow four-year starter Keenan Reynolds, but Niumatalolo likes his athleticism. Smith has played in 19 games, tallying 294 yards on 70 rushes and nine total TDs.

X-FACTOR WR Jamir Tillman
When the Midshipmen do throw the ball (9.2 attempts per game), they throw it deep to Tillman. He made 29 of Navy's 64 catches for 597 yards and five TDs.

POSITION BATTLE Fullback
Navy loses five of its top six rushers. Shawn White (6-1, 255) and Chris High (6-0, 224) are leading candidates at fullback but combined for just 24 carries and 115 yards in 2015.

THE PRESSER

Last year the Midshipmen tied for second in the nation with 326.7 rushing ypg and featured five players who rushed for over 300 yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PLAYING NAVY'S TRIPLE-OPTION?** "You just don't see it a lot. It's hard to get guys to lock in on gap responsibilities, especially with the short weeks we have during the season." —AAC head coach

Navy tries to neutralize a lack of size through scheme and mixing defenses. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NAVY'S DEFENSE?** "They are multiple and can go base 3-4 and then line up a play later and go 4-3. They run different blitzes and pressures from different areas and constantly change it up, which makes it tough to decipher." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11–2 (7–1)
BOWL GAME Military Bowl presented by Northrop Grumman vs. Pittsburgh, 44-28 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Keenan Reynolds: 1,203 yards
RUSHING Keenan Reynolds: 1,373 yards
RECEIVING **Jamir Tillman: 597 yards**
TACKLES Lorentez Barbour: 74
SACKS Will Anthony: 7½
INTERCEPTIONS Brendon Clements: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.1
FPI CHANCE NAVY WINS

9/3 vs. Fordham **92%** ● **9/10** vs. Connecticut **58%** ● **9/17** @ Tulane **64%** ● **9/24** BYE ● **10/1** @ Air Force **33%** ● **10/8** vs. Houston **37%** ● **10/13** @ East Carolina **54%** ● **10/22** vs. Memphis **64%** ● **10/28** @ South Florida **19%** ● **11/5** vs. Notre Dame (Jacksonville, Fla.) **10%** ● **11/12** vs. Tulsa **57%** ● **11/19** BYE ● **11/26** @ SMU **52%** ● **12/10** vs. Army (Baltimore) **65%**

4 Memphis

COACH Mike Norvell (1st season)

The Tigers won 19 games the past two years, but former Arizona State OC Mike Norvell replaces Justin Fuente as Memphis begins life after Paxton Lynch. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Doroland Dorceus
Dorceus, a junior, was Memphis' top all-around back last season, rushing for 661 yards and eight TDs while adding 217 receiving yards and three TD catches.

X-FACTOR LB Genard Avery
Avery, a 6-foot-1, 255-pound junior, had 53 tackles, 6½ TFLs and three sacks, and he will be counted on as a leader, with Memphis losing three senior linebackers to graduation.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Juco transfer Riley Ferguson (formerly of Tennessee), redshirt freshman Brady Davis and fifth-year senior Jason Stewart all have a shot to replace Lynch.

THE PRESSER

Memphis was third in the AAC in total offense (487 ypg) and second in ppg (40.2). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NORVELL'S STYLE COMPARED TO FUENTE'S?** "I know he likes to play with pace and tempo. They have good receivers, and Mike does a good job in the passing game. We expect them to be a dangerous offense." —AAC head coach

Memphis ranked fourth in the conference with 26 sacks but gave up 48 pass plays of 20 or more yards, third most. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE?** "They blitzed and brought a lot of guys in pressure but were susceptible in the secondary. When we protected our quarterback, there were often receivers free downfield." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (5–3)
BOWL GAME Birmingham Bowl vs. Auburn, 31-10 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Paxton Lynch: 3,776 yards
RUSHING **Doroland Dorceus: 661 yards**
RECEIVING Mose Frazier: 797 yards
TACKLES Leonard Pegues: 75
SACKS **Christian Johnson: 4**
INTERCEPTIONS Reggis Ball: 5

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.7
FPI CHANCE MEMPHIS WINS

9/3 vs. Southeast Missouri State **95%** ● **9/10** BYE ● **9/17** vs. Kansas **80%** ● **9/24** vs. Bowling Green **64%** ● **10/1** @ Mississippi **4%** ● **10/6** vs. Temple **45%** ● **10/14** @ Tulane **63%** ● **10/22** @ Navy **36%** ● **10/29** vs. Tulsa **51%** ● **11/5** @ SMU **47%** ● **11/12** vs. South Florida **28%** ● **11/18** @ Cincinnati **30%** ● **11/25** vs. Houston **32%**

5 SMU

COACH Chad Morris (2nd season)
2-10 (0-0 in bowl games)

Chad Morris says his incoming freshmen will make this "a whole different team come August." Good thing: The D gave up 45.7 ppg and the O surrendered 41 sacks. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Courtland Sutton
The 6-foot-4 sophomore ranked fifth nationally among freshmen with 862 receiving yards and tied for the conference lead with nine TD receptions.

X-FACTOR WR James Proche
The SMU staff loves Proche's speed and hopes the redshirt freshman from Dallas and classmate Alex Honey will complement Sutton.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Matt Davis (26 total TDs, 14 turnovers last year) is trying to hold off redshirt freshman Ben Hicks and sophomore Darrel Colbert Jr. Hicks was a touted prospect, while Colbert appeared in seven games.

THE PRESSER

Sutton broke out with two TDs against Baylor in his first game and 115 yards and a TD two weeks later on the road against TCU. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SUTTON?** "He's a *dude*. He's a bigger receiver who you can just throw the ball up to and he'll go get it. I hope he leaves after three years just so I don't have to worry about trying to stop him another year." —AAC head coach

DE Justin Lawler led the Mustangs in tackles (65), tackles for loss (10) and sacks (five). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LAWLER?** "He's a big, long kid who is very strong and very physical with a motor. He kept coming. He's another young guy who has a bright future in this league." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2-10 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Matt Davis: 2,263 yards**
RUSHING **Matt Davis: 761 yards**
RECEIVING **Courtland Sutton: 862 yards**
TACKLES **Justin Lawler: 65**
SACKS **Justin Lawler: 5**
INTERCEPTIONS **Jordan Wyatt: 2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.0
FPI CHANCE SMU WINS

9/3 @ North Texas **80%** • **9/10** @ Baylor **5%** • **9/17** vs. Liberty **92%** • **9/23** vs. TCU **16%** • **10/1** @ Temple **22%** • **10/7** @ Tulsa **27%** • **10/15** BYE • **10/22** vs. Houston **30%** • **10/29** @ Tulane **56%** • **11/5** vs. Memphis **53%** • **11/12** @ East Carolina **42%** • **11/19** vs. South Florida **27%** • **11/26** vs. Navy **48%**

6 Tulane

COACH Willie Fritz (1st season)

After back-to-back 3-9 seasons, Tulane turns to Georgia Southern's Willie Fritz and his .692 career winning percentage in hopes of a turnaround. —G.E.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RBs Sherman Badie and Dontrell Hilliard
Badie and Hilliard have both rushed for more than 600 yards in a season and each should see more carries in an offense designed to run the football with multiple backs.

X-FACTOR DE Ade Aruna
The 6-foot-5, 241-pound junior had 32 stops and three sacks last fall. The line should be an area of strength in new DC Jack Curtis' 4-3.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Senior Devin Powell (four starts) is a dropback passer, while sophomore Glen Cuiellette and freshman Darius Bradwell are athletic types, which Fritz prefers in his option attack.

THE PRESSER

In two years at Georgia Southern, Fritz rotated two QBs who combined to average 1,388 yards rushing per year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FRITZ'S OFFENSE?** "Having the quarterback as a ball carrier requires you to assign a defender to take away the quarterback's legs, which creates a numerical advantage for the offense." —AAC head coach

Undersized (5-10, 208) but productive (82 tackles, 13 TFLs), All-AAC LB Nico Marley plays a lot like dad Rohan did at Miami. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MARLEY?** "Every time I turn on tape of Tulane, I see him running all over the football field and making plays. He plays the game the way I believe football should be played." —AAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (1-7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Tanner Lee: 1,639 yards
RUSHING **Dontrell Hilliard: 646 yards**
RECEIVING Teddy Veal: 644 yards
TACKLES **Nico Marley: 82**
SACKS Royce LaFrance: 6½
INTERCEPTIONS Darion Monroe: 3

SCHEDULE

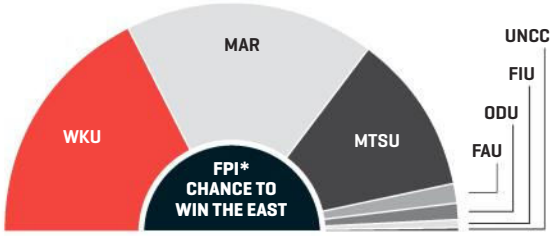
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4
FPI CHANCE TULANE WINS

9/1 @ Wake Forest **12%** • **9/10** vs. Southern **96%** • **9/17** vs. Navy **36%** • **9/24** vs. UL Lafayette **49%** • **10/1** @ Massachusetts (Foxborough) **62%** • **10/7** @ Central Florida **37%** • **10/14** vs. Memphis **37%** • **10/22** @ Tulsa **18%** • **10/29** vs. SMU **44%** • **11/5** BYE • **11/12** @ Houston **9%** • **11/19** vs. Temple **23%** • **11/26** @ Connecticut **20%**

C-USA

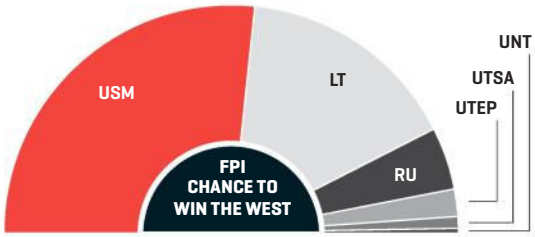
Conference USA outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
WESTERN KENTUCKY	69	35.3%
MARSHALL	76	35.3%
MIDDLE TENNESSEE	86	23.0%
FLORIDA ATLANTIC	109	2.5%
OLD DOMINION	111	2.3%
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL	116	1.4%
CHARLOTTE	125	0.1%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
SOUTHERN MISS	89	53.6%
LOUISIANA TECH	93	31.4%
RICE	114	9.2%
UTEP	122	3.7%
UTSA	123	1.7%
NORTH TEXAS	128	0.4%



AVERAGE FPI RANK

104.7

PROJECTED CHAMPION

26%

WESTERN KENTUCKY

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

QB	**Nick Mullens**	Sr.	Southern Miss

ALL-C-USA

QB	**Nick Mullens**	Sr.	Southern Miss
RB	**Ray Lawry**	Jr.	Old Dominion
RB	**Ito Smith**	Jr.	Southern Miss
WR	**Taywan Taylor**	Sr.	Western Kentucky
WR	**Richie James**	So.	Middle Tennessee
TE	**Jonnu Smith**	Sr.	Florida International
OL	**Cameron Tom**	Sr.	Southern Miss
OL	**Brandon Ray**	Jr.	Western Kentucky
OL	**Will Hernandez**	Jr.	UTEP
OL	**Forrest Lamp**	Sr.	Western Kentucky
OL	**Reggie Bain**	Jr.	Florida Atlantic

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

DE	**Trey Hendrickson**	Sr.	Florida Atlantic

ALL-C-USA

DE	**Trey Hendrickson**	Sr.	Florida Atlantic
DE	**Gary Thompson**	Sr.	Marshall
DT	**Larry Ogunjobi**	Sr.	Charlotte
DT	**Kevin Strong Jr.**	So.	UTSA
LB	**Alvin Jones**	Jr.	UTEP
LB	**TJ Ricks**	Sr.	Old Dominion
LB	**T.J. McCollum**	Jr.	Western Kentucky
CB	**Jeremy Cutrer**	Sr.	Middle Tennessee
CB	**Cornell Armstrong**	Jr.	Southern Miss
S	**Xavier Woods**	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
S	**Kishawn McClain**	Jr.	North Texas

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Jonathan Barnes**	Jr.	Louisiana Tech
P	**Dalton Schomp**	Sr.	Florida Atlantic
RS	**Carlos Henderson**	Jr.	Louisiana Tech

Nick Mullens

The C-USA offensive player of the year threw 38 TDs for Southern Miss, tied for first among returning FBS QBs.

ANDREW DIEB/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Western Kentucky

COACH Jeff Brohm (3rd season)
20–7 (2–0 in bowl games)

Last year WKU scored 44.3 ppg (third in the FBS) and 82 TDs. But 5,000-yard passer Brandon Doughty is gone, so the offense might slow down—a little. —Ben Arledge

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Taywan Taylor
Taylor caught 86 passes for 1,467 yards last year, tops in Conference USA and third in the FBS. His 17 TD catches was second nationally.

X-FACTOR RB Leon Allen
WKU returns Anthony Wales (1,091 yards) and D'Andre Ferby (650 yards). But Allen, whose 2015 season ended with a knee injury in Week 2, rushed for 1,542 yards in 2014.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Nelson Fishback has thrown 26 career passes as Doughty's backup and could enter as the starter. However, a pair of transfers, Mike White (South Florida) and Tyler Ferguson (Louisville/Penn State), could push him.

THE PRESSER

WKU gained the nation's ninth-most yards (526.4 per game), despite holding the ball for only about 30 minutes (58th in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO SLOW WKU DOWN?** "If you try to get in a scoring competition with them, you're going to get beat. You want 12- to 16-play, six- or seven-minute drives. —Conference USA head coach

Only Air Force had more plays of 50-plus yards than Western Kentucky's 17 in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OFFENSE?** "They throw little bubble screens; we're jumping inside when we aren't supposed to, and they are going down the sideline. You have to tackle when you have an opportunity to tackle." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 12–2 (8–0)
BOWL GAME Miami Beach Bowl vs. South Florida, 45-35 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Brandon Doughty: 5,055 yards
RUSHING **Anthony Wales: 1,091 yards**
RECEIVING **Taywan Taylor: 1,467 yards**
TACKLES **T.J. McCollum: 106**
SACKS Nick Holt: 4
INTERCEPTIONS Prince Charles Iworah: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.5
FPI CHANCE WESTERN KENTUCKY WINS

9/1 vs. Rice **88%** • **9/10** @ Alabama **5%** • **9/17** @ Miami (Ohio) **77%** • **9/24** vs. Vanderbilt **50%** • **10/1** vs. Houston Baptist **99%** • **10/6** @ Louisiana Tech **62%** • **10/15** @ Middle Tennessee **52%** • **10/22** vs. Old Dominion **85%** • **10/29** @ Florida Atlantic **71%** • **11/5** vs. Florida International **88%** • **11/12** vs. North Texas **95%** • **11/19** BYE • **11/26** @ Marshall **49%**

2 Marshall

COACH Doc Holliday (7th season)
50–28 (4–0 in bowl games)

Marshall's strength is its defense, which allowed just 17.8 ppg (10th in the FBS). But 6-foot-6 sophomore QB Chase Litton offers a high ceiling on offense. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DL Gary Thompson
The 6-foot-1, 252-pound senior led the team with nine sacks, second best in Conference USA. He'll anchor the Herd's pass rush along with sophomore Ryan Bee (8½ TFLs, four sacks).

X-FACTOR QB Chase Litton
Litton's 54.3 QBR was fifth in the conference. Marshall threw on just 50.9 percent of plays, so Litton could shoulder more of the load.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Hyleck Foster, a converted receiver, rushed for 122 yards against Florida Atlantic in his first game at RB. He averaged 4.5 ypc on 100 attempts but will have to compete with junior Tony Pittman and sophomore Keion Davis.

THE PRESSER

As a freshman, Litton completed 60.1 percent of his passes and was pressured on 6 percent of all dropbacks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LITTON?** "Litton is a rising star in this league. You have to pressure him and collapse the pocket on him because he doesn't run the ball well." —Conference USA head coach

Marshall held 26.8 percent of opponents' red zone drives to no points, ninth best nationally. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SCORING ON THE HERD?** "You can't beat a team like Marshall by kicking field goals. They have the ability to score a lot of points themselves, so you have to be really good in the red zone against them." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–3 (6–2)
BOWL GAME St. Petersburg Bowl vs. Connecticut, 16-10 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Chase Litton: 2,605 yards**
RUSHING Devon Johnson: 593 yards
RECEIVING Davonte Allen: 715 yards
TACKLES Evan McKelvey: 121
SACKS **Gary Thompson: 9**
INTERCEPTIONS **Rodney Allen: 3**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.1
FPI CHANCE MARSHALL WINS

9/3 BYE • **9/10** vs. Morgan State **99%** • **9/17** vs. Akron **85%** • **9/24** vs. Louisville **15%** • **10/1** @ Pittsburgh **14%** • **10/8** @ North Texas **87%** • **10/15** vs. Florida Atlantic **84%** • **10/22** vs. Charlotte **92%** • **10/29** @ Southern Miss **51%** • **11/5** @ Old Dominion **73%** • **11/12** vs. Middle Tennessee **67%** • **11/19** @ Florida International **71%** • **11/26** vs. Western Kentucky **51%**

3 Middle Tennessee

COACH Rick Stockstill (11th season)
64–61 (1–4 in bowl games)

The No. 15 air attack in the FBS (311.7 ypg) returns its QB, top WR and flex TE. But with only five starters back on D, the Blue Raiders should be in shootouts this fall. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Brent Stockstill
Coach Rick Stockstill's son was the only freshman in the country to throw for 4,000 yards, and his 77.7 QBR was the nation's 19th best. He threw 30 TDs to 9 INTs and had 66 completions for 20 or more yards.

X-FACTOR TE Terry Pettis
The senior twice exploded for over 125 yards and at least a score but also disappeared for under 20 yards and no TDs in three games.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Ole Miss transfer I'Tavius Mathers averaged 5.6 ypc for the Rebels over three years. He could get the starting job over Shane Tucker and Desmond Anderson.

THE PRESSER

Stockstill found WR Richie James a conference-high 108 times for 1,346 yards and eight TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DUO?** "That quarterback is really, really good. You can tell it's the coach's son because he plays like a coach out there. And [James is] going to get his catches; he did against everybody." —Conference USA head coach

The Blue Raiders hauled in 17 interceptions and forced 25 turnovers, blanketing the field. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR DEFENSE?** "From front to back, left to right, we thought this defense might be the most athletic in the league. They just had guys all over the field who had size and could run." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Popeyes Bahamas Bowl vs. Western Michigan, 45-31 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Brent Stockstill: 4,005 yards**
RUSHING Jordan Parker: 470 yards
RECEIVING **Richie James: 1,346 yards**
TACKLES T.T. Barber: 89
SACKS **Chris Hale: 4**
INTERCEPTIONS Kevin Byard: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.5
FPI CHANCE MIDDLE TENNESSEE WINS

9/3 vs. Alabama A&M **99%** • **9/10** @ Vanderbilt **24%** • **9/17** @ Bowling Green **46%** • **9/24** vs. Louisiana Tech **66%** • **10/1** @ North Texas **83%** • **10/8** BYE • **10/15** vs. Western Kentucky **48%** • **10/22** @ Missouri **20%** • **10/29** @ Florida International **66%** • **11/5** vs. UTSA **90%** • **11/12** @ Marshall **33%** • **11/19** @ Charlotte **81%** • **11/26** vs. Florida Atlantic **79%**

4 Florida Atlantic

COACH Charlie Partridge (3rd season)
6–18 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Owls had the conference's best pass rush. If QB Jason Driskel and the offense can catch up, they could improve on last season's three-win total. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE Trey Hendrickson
Hendrickson's 13½ sacks in 2015 was not only tops in the conference but also tied for second most nationally. The senior had at least 2½ sacks in all three of FAU's wins.

X-FACTOR QB Jason Driskel
The sophomore replaced the injured Jaquez Johnson but completed just 51 percent of his passes and threw only 8.3 percent of his passes 15 or more yards downfield.

POSITION BATTLE Cornerback
Four true freshmen saw time in the secondary, including Herb Miller (eight passes defended). He'll be pushed by junior Raekwon Williams and sophomore Shelton Lewis.

THE PRESSER

Florida Atlantic sacked, hit or put opposing QBs under duress on 13.4 percent of all drop-backs and tallied 35 sacks, both league highs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS RUSH?** "We had to set all of our protections to Hendrickson. He still had multiple sacks against us. He's the best player in the league on defense." —Conference USA head coach

Only 12.8 percent of carries by RB Greg Howell (6-1, 215 pounds) went for zero or negative yardage. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OWLS' RUNNING GAME?** "They've got big, powerful backs and do a great job. Being able to contain their run game and seeing where it goes from there is key." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Jaquez Johnson: 1,592 yards
RUSHING **Greg Howell: 598 yards**
RECEIVING Jenson Stoshak: 820 yards
TACKLES **Azeez Al-Shaair: 94**
SACKS **Trey Hendrickson: 13½**
INTERCEPTIONS Cre'Von LeBlanc: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.2
FPI CHANCE FLORIDA ATLANTIC WINS

9/3 vs. Southern Illinois **72%** • **9/10** @ Miami (Fla.) **4%** • **9/17** @ Kansas State **9%** • **9/24** vs. Ball State **61%** • **10/1** @ Florida International **46%** • **10/8** vs. Charlotte **78%** • **10/15** @ Marshall **16%** • **10/22** BYE • **10/29** vs. Western Kentucky **29%** • **11/5** @ Rice **43%** • **11/12** vs. UTEP **75%** • **11/19** vs. Old Dominion **62%** • **11/26** @ Middle Tennessee **22%**

5 Old Dominion

COACH Bobby Wilder (8th season)
57–27 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Monarchs return 17 starters, and if they improve the run D (203 ypg), they could go bowling in just their second season of eligibility and eighth overall. —B.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5) | **BOWL GAME** None

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Shuler Bentley started as a freshman only to be replaced by ex-WR David Washington, who then tore his ACL in November. Washington should be at full strength by August, so like the fast-paced offense, the position is wide open.

THE PRESSER

ODU uses the shotgun but is balanced (401 rushes, 433 passes); junior RB Ray Lawry gained 5.9 ypc. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LAWRY?** "When he gets started, he's tough to contend with. You have to disrupt him." —Conference USA head coach

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.6
FPI CHANCE ODU WINS

9/3 vs. Hampton **95%** ● **9/10** @ Appalachian State **13%** ● **9/17** @ NC State **7%** ● **9/24** vs. UTSA **78%** ● **10/1** @ Charlotte **62%** ● **10/8** vs. Massachusetts **76%** ● **10/15** BYE ● **10/22** @ Western Kentucky **15%** ● **10/29** @ UTEP **50%** ● **11/5** vs. Marshall **27%** ● **11/12** vs. Southern Miss **40%** ● **11/19** @ Florida Atlantic **38%** ● **11/26** vs. Florida International **62%**

6 Florida International

COACH Ron Turner (4th season)
10–26 (0–0 in bowl games)

Just five starters are back on D, but FIU's offense returns its leading passer, rusher and receiver—and seven O-linemen with at least four starts last season. —B.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5) | **BOWL GAME** None

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Anthony Wint
The junior made 88 tackles last season. With the loss of Michael Wakefield and Denzell Perine up front, a defense that allowed almost 30 points and 184.7 rushing yards per game will undoubtedly lean on the 224-pound 'backer.

THE PRESSER

Alex McGough completed 64 percent of his throws but averaged just 10.1 yards per completion. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT STOPPING HIM?** "Take away easy throws. Get up on them, and don't give slants, hitches, that type of thing." —Conference USA head coach

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7
FPI CHANCE FIU WINS

9/1 vs. Indiana **22%** ● **9/9** vs. Maryland **27%** ● **9/17** @ Massachusetts **57%** ● **9/24** vs. Central Florida **48%** ● **10/1** vs. Florida Atlantic **54%** ● **10/8** @ UTEP **49%** ● **10/15** @ Charlotte **59%** ● **10/22** vs. Louisiana Tech **42%** ● **10/29** vs. Middle Tennessee **34%** ● **11/5** @ Western Kentucky **12%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** vs. Marshall **30%** ● **11/26** @ Old Dominion **38%**

7 Charlotte

COACH Brad Lambert (4th season)
12–22 (0–0 in bowl games)

Charlotte's first year in the FBS featured abysmal QB play (team QBR of 16.9) and the second-most turnovers in the nation (35). An influx of transfers can only help. —B.A.

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2–10 (0–8) | **BOWL GAME** None

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Lee McNeill tossed one TD and 10 INTs, then was pulled for Brooks Barden (four TDs, five picks). They'll be pushed by transfers Hasaan Klugh (NC A&T), Cody Keith (ECU) and former four-star recruit Kevin Olsen (Miami).

THE PRESSER

RB Kalif Phillips (961 yards) had 29 runs of 10 or more yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PHILLIPS?** "One of the best—if not the best—running backs in the league. It was the second or even third guy who had to finally get him down." —Conference USA head coach

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.6
FPI CHANCE CHARLOTTE WINS

9/1 @ Louisville **1%** ● **9/10** vs. Elon **85%** ● **9/17** vs. Eastern Michigan **49%** ● **9/24** @ Temple **6%** ● **10/1** vs. Old Dominion **38%** ● **10/8** @ Florida Atlantic **22%** ● **10/15** vs. Florida International **41%** ● **10/22** @ Marshall **8%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ Southern Miss **14%** ● **11/12** vs. Rice **42%** ● **11/19** vs. Middle Tennessee **19%** ● **11/26** @ UTSA **39%**

1 Southern Miss

COACH Jay Hopson (1st season)

Thirteen starters return, including a 4,000-yard passer and a 1,000-yard rusher. But there's a new coach (Jay Hopson), now that Todd Monken is off to the NFL. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Nick Mullens
Only five players threw for more than Mullen's 4,476 yards, and just three topped his 38 TDs.

X-FACTOR RB Ito Smith
Smith rushed for 1,128 yards and 10 TDs despite splitting time with Jalen Richard (1,098 yards, 14 TDs). With Richard gone, Smith will be counted on to carry the new rushing offense.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
There's no replacing Michael Thomas (1,391 yards, 19.6 ypc), but someone has to try. Little-used sophomores Korey Robertson and Jordan Mitchell will challenge mended Marquise Ricard (417 yards in 2014) for a spot opposite D.J. Thompson (779 yards).

THE PRESSER

Mullens completed 63.5 percent of his throws last year and threw for 331 yards and two TDs in the Heart of Dallas Bowl against Washington. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE QB?** "Mullens is the best player in the league coming back. Phenomenal player. They can run it, they can throw it. But Mullens is the key." —Conference USA head coach

With a two-score lead, the Southern Miss pass D allowed just a 51.1 completion percentage. Safety D'Nerius Antoine was a star with 103 tackles. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS DEFENSE?** "You can't fall behind schedule. They can get into nickel and dime, and they've got some really good defensive backs." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–5 (7–1)
BOWL GAME Zaxby's Heart of Dallas Bowl vs. Washington, 44-31 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Nick Mullens: 4,476 yards**
RUSHING **Ito Smith: 1,128 yards**
RECEIVING Michael Thomas: 1,391 yards
TACKLES **D'Nerius Antoine: 103**
SACKS **Dylan Bradley: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS Kalan Reed: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.6
FPI CHANCE SOUTHERN MISS WINS

9/3 @ Kentucky **20%** • **9/10** vs. Savannah State **99%** • **9/17** vs. Troy **66%** • **9/24** @ UTEP **72%** • **10/1** vs. Rice **77%** • **10/8** @ UTSA **75%** • **10/15** @ LSU **2%** • **10/22** BYE • **10/29** vs. Marshall **50%** • **11/5** vs. Charlotte **86%** • **11/12** @ Old Dominion **60%** • **11/19** @ North Texas **81%** • **11/25** vs. Louisiana Tech **58%**

2 Louisiana Tech

COACH Skip Holtz (4th season)
22–17 (2–0 in bowl games)

Only nine starters return, the fewest in the conference, and there's no big-name transfer QB. Winning nine games for a third straight year could be a tall order. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Trent Taylor
The senior hauled in 99 passes for 1,282 yards last season, the league's fourth most. He caught 75.6 percent of all targets.

X-FACTOR DE Jaylon Ferguson
The 6-foot-5 sophomore led the team with 15 tackles for loss. His six sacks tied for the team high, and he forced two fumbles.

POSITION BATTLE Cornerback
The pass defense ranked 99th (256.5 ypg) in the FBS, as it broke in then-freshmen Aaron Roberson (1 INT last season), Trey Spencer and Ephraim Kitchen. Expect the trio to be pushed by transfers Ronald Lewis (Arizona State) and Jarrell Jackson (Hawaii).

THE PRESSER

Louisiana Tech created 22 turnovers last year and has 64 since 2014. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE?** "Any time you play a team as talented as Louisiana Tech, you can't give them anything. That's what it comes down to: protecting the ball." —Conference USA head coach

At just 119.3 rushing yards allowed per game, the Bulldogs had the league's best run defense. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHY THEY'RE SO GOOD?** "You have to be able to run the football against that stout run defense. They usually have some big playmakers up front. I know they lose [Vernon Butler] inside, but they always seem to replace those guys." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (6–2)
BOWL GAME R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl vs. Arkansas State, 47-28 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Jeff Driskel: 4,033 yards
RUSHING Kenneth Dixon: 1,070 yards
RECEIVING **Trent Taylor: 1,282 yards**
TACKLES Beau Fitte: 104
SACKS Vontarrius Dora: 6
INTERCEPTIONS Bryson Abraham: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.9
FPI CHANCE LOUISIANA TECH WINS

9/3 @ Arkansas **7%** • **9/10** vs. South Carolina State **94%** • **9/17** @ Texas Tech **14%** • **9/24** @ Middle Tennessee **34%** • **10/1** vs. UTEP **83%** • **10/6** vs. Western Kentucky **38%** • **10/15** @ Massachusetts (Foxborough) **73%** • **10/22** @ Florida International **58%** • **10/29** vs. Rice **74%** • **11/5** @ North Texas **79%** • **11/12** vs. UTSA **86%** • **11/19** BYE • **11/25** @ Southern Miss **42%**

3 Rice

COACH David Bailiff (10th season)
53–60 (3–1 in bowl games)

Blame the Owls' first losing season since 2011 on a porous defense that ranked 102nd nationally. Blame the 16 returning starters if it happens again. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Alex Lyons
Despite the lack of a formidable defense, the senior linebacker turned in 77 tackles, 5½ TFLs, 1½ sacks and 4 passes broken up.

X-FACTOR RB Darik Dillard
The 5-foot-10, 215-pound senior must put his new QB in manageable situations. Dillard averaged 5.2 ypc last year, and only 11.9 percent of his runs went for zero or negative yardage.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Senior Tyler Stehling has the early lead on the starting job but will have competition from Nate German, who also caught 18 passes as a wide receiver last year, and a pair of redshirt freshmen in J.T. Granato and Jackson Tyner.

THE PRESSER

Rice ran on 54.6 percent of all plays, and its 177.6 rushing yards per game ranked second in Conference USA. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RICE'S PHILOSOPHY?** "Any time you play Rice, you know they are going to control the ball. They're gonna run the ball." —Conference USA head coach

Six of Rice's front seven defenders return, and DE Graysen Schantz (ACL) is back after missing all but Week 1 of 2015. The run defense that gave up 190.3 ypg should improve. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING RICE'S DEFENSE?** "They really keep those linebackers clean. You've got to get the ball out on the edge and get away from those guys." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Driphus Jackson: 2,348 yards
RUSHING **Darik Dillard: 698 yards**
RECEIVING **Zach Wright: 554 yards**
TACKLES **Alex Lyons: 77**
SACKS **Brian Womac: 4**
INTERCEPTIONS Zach Espinosa: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.3
FPI CHANCE RICE WINS

9/1 @ Western Kentucky **12%** • **9/10** @ Army **26%** • **9/17** vs. Baylor **4%** • **9/24** vs. North Texas **78%** • **10/1** @ Southern Miss **23%** • **10/8** BYE • **10/15** vs. UTSA **77%** • **10/22** vs. Prairie View A&M **94%** • **10/29** @ Louisiana Tech **26%** • **11/5** vs. Florida Atlantic **57%** • **11/12** @ Charlotte **58%** • **11/19** vs. UTEP **70%** • **11/26** @ Stanford **2%**

4 UTEP

COACH Sean Kugler (4th season)
14–23 (0–1 in bowl games)

The Miners cobbled together five wins last year despite struggling on offense after losing star RB Aaron Jones to injury. Finding a QB could return them to .500. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Alvin Jones
The junior averaged 7.8 tackles per game, and his 6½ sacks and 14½ tackles for loss led all linebackers in the conference.

X-FACTOR RB Aaron Jones
Alvin's twin missed nearly all of last year with an ankle injury, then was charged with DWI in February. Aaron, who is expected to return, averaged 102 ypg over three seasons.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Junior Mack Leftwich threw for 1,228 yards and nine touchdowns. However, two other QBs got playing time: Ryan Metz completed 59 percent of his 140 passes, and Kavika Johnson picked up more than 200 rushing yards.

THE PRESSER

The Miners were sixth in the nation in time of possession, holding the ball for 33:38 per game. Their 29.1 seconds per play was tops in Conference USA and eighth in the country. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR STYLE?** "They're going to run the ball, they're going to get in their two tight ends and they're going to try to beat the crap out of you." —Conference USA head coach

Aaron Jones was exceptional in his first two seasons, especially when he rushed for 1,321 yards in 2014. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT JONES?** "He's about as good as there is in the league. And with that guy, you have to have two, three and four guys around him to get him down." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Mack Leftwich: 1,228 yards**
RUSHING Jeremiah Laufasa: 381 yards
RECEIVING **Jaquan White: 494 yards**
TACKLES **Alvin Jones: 93**
SACKS **Alvin Jones: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Dashone Smith: 1**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.2
FPI CHANCE UTEP WINS

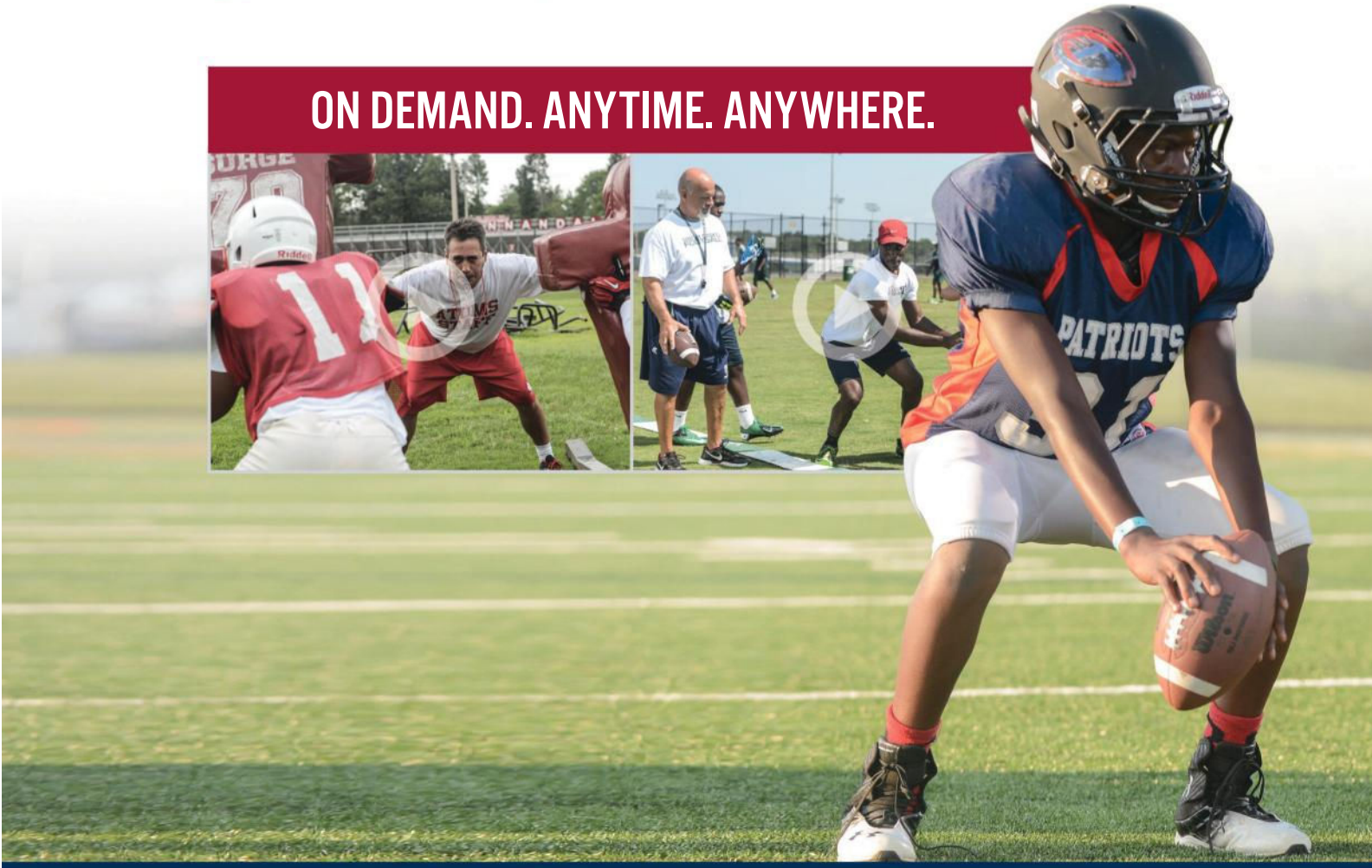
9/3 vs. New Mexico State **57%** • **9/10** @ Texas **2%** • **9/17** vs. Army **39%** • **9/24** vs. Southern Miss **29%** • **10/1** @ Louisiana Tech **17%** • **10/8** vs. Florida International **51%** • **10/15** BYE • **10/22** @ UTSA **51%** • **10/29** vs. Old Dominion **50%** • **11/5** vs. Houston Baptist **98%** • **11/12** @ Florida Atlantic **25%** • **11/19** @ Rice **30%** • **11/26** vs. North Texas **69%**

YOUR NEW POWER DUO IN COACHING DEVELOPMENT

AT ALL LEVELS

USA FOOTBALL | COACHES CHOICE™

ON DEMAND. ANYTIME. ANYWHERE.



Sign up to receive a 14-day **FREE** online subscription at **usafootball.com/coachtraining.**

PROMO CODE: ESPN

1000+ VIDEOS COVERING

- Xs and Os
- Techniques and Drills
- Character Development
- Leadership Training
- Sports Nutrition
- Speed and Quickness
- Strength and Conditioning
- Team Building

... and more!

EXCLUSIVE BOOK CLUB FOR PROFESSIONAL AND COACHING DEVELOPMENT 24/7.

TOP COACHES: URBAN MEYER, ART BRILES, CHRIS ASH, WADE PHILLIPS, AND OTHERS

★ ★ ★

BE THE FIRST TO GAIN ACCESS

5 UTSA

COACH Frank Wilson (1st season)

New coach Frank Wilson inherits just 10 returning starters, but one is 1,000-yard rusher Jarveon Williams. A transfer QB could jump-start the passing game. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Jarveon Williams
Williams was the most prominent piece in the offense last year, gaining 1,042 rushing yards without a fumble. Only three C-USA backs averaged more than his 6.0 yards per carry.

X-FACTOR DE Marcus Davenport
The 6-foot-6, 225-pound junior had four sacks and 49 tackles and will be needed to offset the loss of DE Jason Neill (8½ sacks).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Junior Dalton Sturm started seven games but managed just a 24.3 QBR. He'll compete with Jared Johnson, a grad transfer from Sam Houston State who threw for 5,352 yards, ran for 1,601 and scored 50 TDs in three seasons.

THE PRESSER

Wilson spent six seasons coaching LSU's backfield, which averaged 2.4 yards after contact per rush, third among Power 5 teams in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU EXPECT?** "I'm sure we will see a little LSU power in their offense, something we don't see a lot of in this conference. They've got a great running back." —Conference USA head coach

The UTSA pass defense allowed 8.1 yards per attempt last season, so it's no surprise opponents averaged 34.2 attempts per game. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO ATTACK THEM?** "We really focused on getting the corners into one-on-ones last year. A lot of good play-action and you get them into man coverage." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Dalton Sturm: 1,354 yards**
RUSHING **Jarveon Williams: 1,042 yards**
RECEIVING David Morgan II: 566 yards
TACKLES Duke Wheeler: 93
SACKS Jason Neill: 8½
INTERCEPTIONS Bennett Okotcha: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.8
FPI CHANCE UTSA WINS

9/3 vs. Alabama State **94%** • **9/10** @ Colorado State **15%** • **9/17** vs. Arizona State **8%** • **9/24** @ Old Dominion **22%** • **10/1** BYE • **10/8** vs. Southern Miss **25%** • **10/15** @ Rice **23%** • **10/22** vs. UTEP **49%** • **10/29** vs. North Texas **62%** • **11/5** @ Middle Tennessee **10%** • **11/12** @ Louisiana Tech **14%** • **11/19** @ Texas A&M **1%** • **11/26** vs. Charlotte **61%**

6 North Texas

COACH Seth Littrell (1st season)

The Mean Green went 1-11 and were outscored by 26 ppg. The good news: Fifteen starters return, and new coach Seth Littrell brings an exciting offense. —B.A.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE Jarrian Roberts
Roberts was one of the few bright spots for a defense that gave up more than 500 ypg. The senior recorded 6½ sacks and 10 TFLs.

X-FACTOR QB Alec Morris
The Alabama—yes, that Alabama—transfer is the front-runner for the starting job, ahead of Connor Means and Caleb Chumley. However, Morris has just a single 6-yard pass under his belt in three seasons.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
Turner Smiley and Tee Goree lead the way (a combined 40 catches for 373 yards in '15), but freshman Deion Hair'Griffin and senior Thaddeous Thompson will get reps.

THE PRESSER

Littrell ran the offense for a North Carolina team that had the 15th-most throws of 10 or more yards downfield (348) in the Power 5 the past two seasons. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT?** "We know [he] worked for Larry Fedora, so we assume that's what they will be doing: throwing the ball down the field." —Conference USA head coach

The Mean Green allowed 239.9 yards on the ground per game, ninth most in the FBS. Opponents picked up 5.4 ypc and 38 TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PLAYING THEM?** "Well, we aren't going to try to fit square pegs in round holes. If they are going to give us the run, then we are going to hopefully be able to run." —Conference USA head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 1–11 (1–7)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING DaMarcus Smith: 1,010 yards
RUSHING **Jeffrey Wilson: 830 yards**
RECEIVING Carlos Harris: 727 yards
TACKLES **Kishawn McClain: 110**
SACKS **Jarrian Roberts: 6½**
INTERCEPTIONS Zac Whitfield: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 2.8
FPI CHANCE NORTH TEXAS WINS

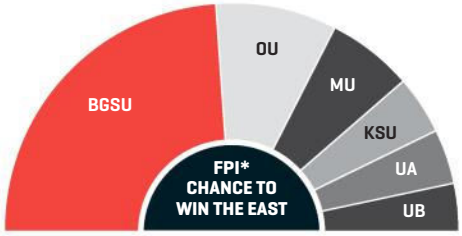
9/3 vs. SMU **20%** • **9/10** vs. Bethune-Cookman **80%** • **9/17** @ Florida **1%** • **9/24** @ Rice **22%** • **10/1** vs. Middle Tennessee **17%** • **10/8** vs. Marshall **13%** • **10/15** BYE • **10/22** @ Army **15%** • **10/29** @ UTSA **38%** • **11/5** vs. Louisiana Tech **22%** • **11/12** @ Western Kentucky **5%** • **11/19** vs. Southern Miss **20%** • **11/26** @ UTEP **31%**

DON KELLY/AP IMAGES

MAC

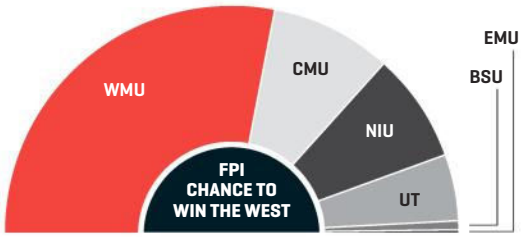
MAC outlook

EAST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
BOWLING GREEN	90	47.9%
OHIO	102	17.4%
MIAMI (OHIO)	112	12.0%
KENT STATE	105	8.5%
AKRON	113	7.7%
BUFFALO	115	6.5%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
WESTERN MICHIGAN	53	56.4%
CENTRAL MICHIGAN	80	17.4%
NORTHERN ILLINOIS	79	15.6%
TOLEDO	87	9.4%
BALL STATE	110	1.1%
EASTERN MICHIGAN	119	0.1%



AVERAGE FPI RANK

97.1

PROJECTED CHAMPION

46%

WESTERN MICHIGAN

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

WR	**Corey Davis**	Sr.	Western Michigan

ALL-MAC

QB	**Cooper Rush**	Sr.	Central Michigan
RB	**Joel Bouagnon**	Sr.	Northern Illinois
RB	**Jamauri Bogan**	So.	Western Michigan
WR	**Corey Davis**	Sr.	Western Michigan
WR	**Kenny Golladay**	Sr.	Northern Illinois
WR	**Ronnie Moore**	Sr.	Bowling Green
OL	**Tim McAuliffe**	Jr.	Bowling Green
OL	**Ryan Hunter**	Jr.	Bowling Green
OL	**Chukwuma Okorafor**	Jr.	Western Michigan
OL	**Storm Norton**	Sr.	Toledo
OL	**Levon Myers**	Sr.	Northern Illinois

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

CB	**Shawun Lurry**	Jr.	Northern Illinois

ALL-MAC

DE	**Joshua Posley**	Sr.	Ball State
DE	**Jamal Marcus**	Sr.	Akron
DT	**Pat O'Connor**	Sr.	Eastern Michigan
DT	**Terence Waugh**	Sr.	Kent State
LB	**Quentin Poling**	Jr.	Ohio
LB	**Austin Valdez**	Jr.	Bowling Green
LB	**Sean Wiggins**	Sr.	Ball State
CB	**Shawun Lurry**	Jr.	Northern Illinois
CB	**Demetrius Monday**	Sr.	Kent State
S	**Nate Holley**	Sr.	Kent State
S	**DeJuan Rogers**	Sr.	Toledo

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Christian Hagan**	Jr.	Northern Illinois
P	**Joseph Davidson**	Jr.	Bowling Green
RS	**Aregeros Turner**	Sr.	Northern Illinois

Corey Davis

Davis needs just 403 yards to pass Jordan White (4,187, 2007-11) as WMU's career receiving leader.

MIKE CARTER/USA TODAY SPORTS

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Bowling Green

COACH Mike Jinks (1st season)

The Falcons' reward for two MAC titles in three years? Losing their coach to the ACC. Again. Still, Mike Jinks' air raid should help them stay topflight. —Anthony Olivieri

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Austin Valdez
The junior tied for the second-most tackles in the FBS (144), including a team-high 11 TFLs.

X-FACTOR WR Ronnie Moore
Moore is a prototypical slot receiver who thrives under the Falcons' mandate to get the ball out quickly (think Julian Edelman). BGSU loses a pair of 1,000-yard WRs from last year, so the dependable Moore (18 career receiving TDs) must help ease in a new starting QB.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
BGSU will miss Travis Greene's 43 career TDs but has options: Fred Coppet, who gained 825 yards in '15, and Matt Domer, who showed big-strike ability with a 95-yard TD run at Ball State.

THE PRESSER

QB James Knapke started 13 games in '14, filling in admirably for an injured Matt Johnson (3,173 yards, 15 TDs). Two years later, he's the leader for the starting gig. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT KNAPKE'S TRANSITION IS FOR 2016?** "Historically, the MAC has been dominated by teams with great QBs, going back to Ben Roethlisberger. That's a key factor." —MAC head coach

BGSU's defense, which returns six starters, bent (417.8 ypg allowed in '15) but didn't break (57.4 red zone percentage). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STATE OF THE D?** "It's probably better than those stats. They're so far ahead that people get their yards when they're losing by 30." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–4 (7–1)
BOWL GAME GoDaddy Bowl
vs. Georgia Southern, 58-27 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Matt Johnson: 4,946 yards
RUSHING Travis Greene: 1,299 yards
RECEIVING Roger Lewis: 1,544 yards
TACKLES **Austin Valdez: 144**
SACKS Taylor Royster: 6
INTERCEPTIONS **Alfonso Mack: 6**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.0
FPI CHANCE BOWLING GREEN WINS

9/3 @ Ohio State **5%** ● **9/10** vs. North Dakota **94%** ● **9/17** vs. Middle Tennessee **54%** ● **9/24** @ Memphis **36%** ● **10/1** vs. Eastern Michigan **82%** ● **10/8** @ Ohio **56%** ● **10/15** @ Toledo **39%** ● **10/22** vs. Miami (Ohio) **75%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/1** @ Northern Illinois **32%** ● **11/9** @ Akron **63%** ● **11/15** vs. Kent State **71%** ● **11/25** vs. Buffalo **78%**

2 Ohio

COACH Frank Solich (12th season)
80–61 (2–5 in bowl games)

Frank Solich's hallmark is unspectacular consistency: 7.3 wins per season since '05. That's in reach again in 2016, with experience at QB and a solid defense. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Quentin Poling
Poling is the hybrid, good-in-coverage LB who excels in the pass-happy MAC. And even though he sat out two games last season (knee), he amassed 10½ TFLs and 4 INTs, two of which he returned to the house.

X-FACTOR QB J.D. Sprague
The senior is a mixed bag. He recorded a 29.3 QBR splitting time (five starts) with Derrius Vick in 2014. But when he was relegated to backup duty last season, he threw for seven TDs.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
Who will join mainstay OT Troy Watson (27 career starts)? It's a crowded group; at least six Bobcats are vying for time at tackle and guard.

THE PRESSER

Five players logged at least one rushing TD last year, including three returning Bobcats. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW OHIO'S OFFENSE GETS EVERYONE INVOLVED?** "They don't overpower you in one particular area, but they spread you out. Their QB runs, their running back runs ... they run a little option, they mix it up." —MAC head coach

Ohio has never picked off fewer than 12 passes under Solich, and it was one of 16 FBS teams that returned three interceptions for TDs in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D'S BALL-HAWK NATURE?** "You better not lose the turnover battle [against the Bobcats]. They make one less mistake than your team makes." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (5–3)
BOWL GAME Raycom Media Camellia Bowl
vs. Appalachian State, 31-29 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Derrius Vick: 1,809 yards
RUSHING **A.J. Ouellette: 687 yards**
RECEIVING **Sebastian Smith: 770 yards**
TACKLES **Quentin Poling: 69**
SACKS **Tarell Basham: 5½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Quentin Poling: 4**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.1
FPI CHANCE OHIO WINS

9/3 vs. Texas State **82%** ● **9/10** @ Kansas **43%** ● **9/17** @ Tennessee **1%** ● **9/24** vs. Gardner-Webb **96%** ● **10/1** @ Miami (Ohio) **48%** ● **10/8** vs. Bowling Green **44%** ● **10/15** vs. Eastern Michigan **73%** ● **10/22** @ Kent State **44%** ● **10/27** @ Toledo **27%** ● **11/3** vs. Buffalo **66%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/15** @ Central Michigan **23%** ● **11/22** vs. Akron **61%**

3 Miami (Ohio)

COACH Chuck Martin (3rd season)
5–19 (0–0 in bowl games)

The RedHawks have won just five games since 2013, and the slow crawl to relevance hinges on nine returning starters jump-starting an anemic attack. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE JT Jones
The RedHawks collected 30 sacks last season, a solid showing that was tied for 42nd in the FBS. Jones led the charge (10 sacks, including a school-record four against Eastern Michigan).

X-FACTOR QB Billy Bahl
Bahl gained valuable reps as a true freshman in 2015 (seven starts), but Miami will need a better showing in Year 2. He threw more INTs (13) than TDs (eight) en route to a 21.6 QBR.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Miami didn't have a 500-yard rusher in 2015 (3.6 ypc as a team), but it did claim three freshman RBs with 50-plus carries. One of them must emerge as the primary option.

THE PRESSER

Last season the RedHawks converted just 31.2 percent of their third downs (No. 118 in the FBS), when dual-threat QBs are most effective. Bahl finished with minus-70 yards rushing on the season. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO PLAN FOR BAHL?** "He wasn't the most mobile but had a great arm. You have to get hits on him." —MAC head coach

Three D-linemen recorded at least 4½ sacks last season, and two return for a defense that totaled 83 TFLs, third most in the MAC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LINE'S STRENGTH?** "With a guy like Jones, you've got to double-team a lot. You've got to put two hats on him and let the linebackers roam until you can get him under control." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (2–6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Billy Bahl: 1,416 yards**
RUSHING **Alonzo Smith: 498 yards**
RECEIVING **Rokeem Williams: 543 yards**
TACKLES Kent Kern: 82
SACKS **JT Jones: 10**
INTERCEPTIONS Brison Burris: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.8
FPI CHANCE MIAMI (OHIO) WINS

9/3 @ Iowa **6%** • **9/10** vs. Eastern Illinois **74%** • **9/17** vs. Western Kentucky **23%** • **9/24** @ Cincinnati **14%** • **10/1** vs. Ohio **52%** • **10/8** @ Akron **43%** • **10/15** vs. Kent State **54%** • **10/22** @ Bowling Green **25%** • **10/29** @ Eastern Michigan **52%** • **11/4** vs. Central Michigan **31%** • **11/12** @ Buffalo **42%** • **11/19** BYE • **11/22** vs. Ball State **59%**

4 Kent State

COACH Paul Haynes (4th season)
9–26 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Golden Flashes were, well, flashless in 2015: no 1,000-yard passer, receiver or rusher. No surprise, they'll need a stout D to pad the win column in 2016. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON S Nate Holley
Behind Holley (15-plus tackles in five of his final seven games), the Flashes allowed 4.9 ypp in '15, second best in the MAC.

X-FACTOR WR Antwan Dixon
The sophomore offers Kent State a rare opportunity for explosiveness—Dixon's first career catch was a 20-yard TD, and he ran for 47- and 75-yard scores in back-to-back games.

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Dixon and Raekwon James will see carries. But the Flashes are hoping Justin Rankin, an early enrollee and three-time All-Ohio prep, will emerge for a ground game that managed just six TDs last year, worst in the MAC.

THE PRESSER

The Flashes' 30 plays of 20-plus yards last year? Second worst in the FBS. Their 4.1 ypp? Dead last. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT KENT STATE'S LACK OF BIG PLAYS?** "You prepare for a lower-scoring game. When you have a team that struggles for consistency, you have to make them earn it and make sure they don't get big chunks." —MAC head coach

Kent State returns the league's third-leading pass rusher (nine sacks) in Terence Waugh. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS D?** "You gotta protect your QB first. Waugh is a very good pass rusher, but you gotta give your QB a chance. And they use their safeties in doubling, so you have to find a one-on-one matchup to exploit." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (2–6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Colin Reardon: 901 yards**
RUSHING Trayion Durham: 428 yards
RECEIVING **Antwan Dixon: 355 yards**
TACKLES **Nate Holley: 141**
SACKS **Terence Waugh: 9**
INTERCEPTIONS **Demetrius Monday: 6**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.1
FPI CHANCE KENT STATE WINS

9/3 @ Penn State **6%** • **9/10** vs. North Carolina A&T **87%** • **9/17** vs. Monmouth **92%** • **9/24** @ Alabama **1%** • **10/1** vs. Akron **63%** • **10/8** @ Buffalo **48%** • **10/15** @ Miami (Ohio) **46%** • **10/22** vs. Ohio **56%** • **10/29** @ Central Michigan **21%** • **11/5** BYE • **11/8** vs. Western Michigan **22%** • **11/15** @ Bowling Green **29%** • **11/25** vs. Northern Illinois **34%**

5 Akron

COACH Terry Bowden (5th season)
19–30 (1–0 in bowl games)

The Zips are coming off their first eight-win season since moving up to the FBS in 1987, but with a D in rebuilding mode, a return to mid-MAC form is likely. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Thomas Woodson
His 2015 stats were mostly pedestrian—53.6 QBR, 7.2 ypa—but in his last three games, Woodson threw five TDs with one interception.

X-FACTOR WR JoJo Natson
The Utah State transfer specializes as a don't-kick-it-to-him return man (11.7 yards per punt return in 2014, No. 9 in the FBS). Says coach Terry Bowden: "He can be a single guy who can win ballgames."

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
The Zips lose last year's starting trio, Jatavis Brown (20 TFLs) included. Ulysees Gilbert, Brian Bell, Andrew Hauser and John Rachal—with 36 total tackles in '15—will vie for fill-in duty.

THE PRESSER

Akron's run-first offense loses two senior backs, but it'll use Woodson's legs in 2016 (591 rush yards, tops among MAC passers). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT WORKS VS. THE RUN-HEAVY ATTACK?** "You better use a little creativity to bring pressure ... so they don't know where that extra hat is coming from." —MAC defensive coach

Only four starters return to a defense that allowed 4.9 ypp, No. 1 in the MAC. But DL Jamal Marcus and Se'Von Pittman (8½ sacks combined) will need to be accounted for. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE FRONT LINE?** "Best in the league last year. They dominate in the run and at pressuring the QB. We try to throw it early so they soften up." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (5–3)
BOWL GAME Famous Idaho Potato Bowl vs. Utah State, 23-21 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Thomas Woodson: 2,202 yards**
RUSHING Conor Hundley: 911 yards
RECEIVING **Jerome Lane: 782 yards**
TACKLES Jatavis Brown: 116
SACKS Jatavis Brown: 12
INTERCEPTIONS **DeAndre Scott: 6**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4
FPI CHANCE AKRON WINS

9/3 vs. Virginia Military Institute 95% • **9/10** @ Wisconsin 4% • **9/17** @ Marshall 15% • **9/24** vs. Appalachian State 22% • **10/1** @ Kent State 37% • **10/8** vs. Miami (Ohio) 57% • **10/15** vs. Western Michigan 17% • **10/22** @ Ball State 40% • **10/27** @ Buffalo 43% • **11/2** vs. Toledo 34% • **11/9** vs. Bowling Green 37% • **11/19** BYE • **11/22** @ Ohio 39%

6 Buffalo

COACH Lance Leipold (2nd season)
5–7 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Bulls lose the face of their program—QB Joe Licata started 40 straight games from 2012 to 2015—and seven more starters on offense. That's a lot to overcome. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Jordan Johnson
Johnson split time with departing Anthone Taylor last year but was the Bulls' go-to back in the red zone. He cashed in 10 TDs inside the 20-yard line, tied for third most in the MAC.

X-FACTOR LB Jarrett Franklin
With the Bulls down their top tackler and sacker, the time is right for Franklin's return. He started 10 games and registered 5 TFLs in 2014 before sitting out last season (back).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Graduate transfer Grant Rohach (five career starts at Iowa State) has experience; sophomore Chris Merchant knows the system; redshirt frosh Tyree Jackson has size (6-5, 230).

THE PRESSER

Licata's 76 career TD passes gives way to ... 10, all courtesy of Rohach. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO CONFUSE A NEW QB?** "You've got to mix up looks—pressure, not pressure. That was a key for us last year, and we'd do that against a less experienced quarterback as well." —MAC head coach

Buffalo returns three DBs to a defense that picked off opposing QBs 13 times in 2015 (T4 in the MAC). The key: Soften up the Bulls on the ground first. Their seven losses came in games in which they allowed 150-plus yards rushing. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D'S VULNERABILITY?** "You gotta run the ball better. We didn't do too much dictating offensively [last year]. Run. The. Ball. Better." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Joe Licata: 2,969 yards
RUSHING Anthone Taylor: 829 yards
RECEIVING Ron Willoughby: 813 yards
TACKLES Nick Gilbo: 113
SACKS Okezie Alozie: 5
INTERCEPTIONS Okezie Alozie: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7
FPI CHANCE BUFFALO WINS

9/2 vs. Albany 92% • **9/10** BYE • **9/17** @ Nevada 23% • **9/24** vs. Army 45% • **10/1** @ Boston College 8% • **10/8** vs. Kent State 52% • **10/15** vs. Ball State 56% • **10/22** @ Northern Illinois 17% • **10/27** vs. Akron 57% • **11/3** @ Ohio 35% • **11/12** vs. Miami (Ohio) 58% • **11/19** @ Western Michigan 9% • **11/25** @ Bowling Green 22%

1 Western Michigan

COACH P.J. Fleck (4th season)
17–21 (1–1 in bowl games)

P.J. Fleck's prolific spread has the Broncos absolutely humming. With a 3,500-yard QB, a 1,400-yard WR and a 1,000-yard RB returning, no slowdown is in sight. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Corey Davis
He exceeded 100 receiving yards in nine games last year, the most in the country. And Davis' 27 receiving TDs since 2014? Third best.

X-FACTOR WR LeVante Bellamy
The backfield is replete with stars—Jamauri Bogan and Jarvion Franklin, the MAC's past two freshmen of the year—but Fleck will use Bellamy in speed sweep packages, forcing defenses to track his trio of weapons pre-snap.

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
Two of WMU's top three tacklers at LB return, though the D gave up 5.3 yards per rush in '15 (No. 113 in the FBS), so Edward Rolle, Kasey Carson and Lucas Cherocci will vie for reps.

THE PRESSER

Leading the way on offense last year was QB Zach Terrell, who completed 67 percent of his passes, No. 11 in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CONTAIN THE OFFENSE?** "You've got to be very, very smart and almost have to pick your poison from play to play based on down and distance." —MAC head coach

The defense gave up chunks of yards in 2015 (6.3 ypp, No. 110 in the FBS) but limited opponents to a more respectable 26 red zone TDs. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW YOU VIEW WMU'S D?** "Yards per play is a valuable stat but a little overrated compared to points on the scoreboard. That's a risky defense. High risk, high reward." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–5 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Popeyes Bahamas Bowl vs. Middle Tennessee, 45-31 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Zach Terrell: 3,510 yards**
RUSHING **Jamauri Bogan: 1,051 yards**
RECEIVING **Corey Davis: 1,436 yards**
TACKLES **Asantay Brown: 103**
SACKS **Keion Adams: 4½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Darius Phillips: 5**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 9.5
FPI CHANCE WESTERN MICHIGAN WINS

9/3 @ Northwestern 42% • **9/10** vs. NC Central 99% • **9/17** @ Illinois 54% • **9/24** vs. Georgia Southern 75% • **10/1** @ Central Michigan 60% • **10/8** vs. Northern Illinois 73% • **10/15** @ Akron 83% • **10/22** vs. Eastern Michigan 93% • **10/29** BYE • **11/1** @ Ball State 82% • **11/8** @ Kent State 78% • **11/19** vs. Buffalo 91% • **11/25** vs. Toledo 76%

2 Central Michigan

COACH John Bonamego (2nd season)
7–6 (0–1 in bowl games)

A dynamic passing offense, led by record-setting QB Cooper Rush, will complement a stingy passing defense, which returns eight starters. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Cooper Rush
Who else? In a conference packed with talent, Rush stands out (69.4 QBR, No. 2 in the MAC). Despite attempting the 10th-most passes in the FBS last year (489), he threw just 11 picks.

X-FACTOR RB Romello Ross
Even in the Chippewas' decidedly pass-first attack, John Bonamego said he is looking to solidify a backfield with no clear workhorse. Ross could be his guy: He tied for a team-high four rush TDs last year despite limited duty.

POSITION BATTLE Left tackle
Other question marks (tight end, safety) take a back seat to whoever will protect Rush's blind side—be it Joe Austin or Jack Ford.

THE PRESSER

Rush racked up 53 passes of 20-plus yards last year (No. 19 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO SLOW CMU DOWN?** "You've got to put them in longer passing situations. If they are sitting there with second-and-4 or less, they are in great play-action situations. You can't allow big plays." —MAC head coach

Star DB Tony Annese (five pass breakups, two picks in 2015) returns to lead a pass D that gave up 6.5 ypa, second fewest in the MAC. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO COUNTERACT THAT?** "You've got to try to have some type of run game, and the play-action has to be a part of [the plan]. The screen game too." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Quick Lane Bowl vs. Minnesota, 21-14 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Cooper Rush: 3,848 yards**
RUSHING Martez Walker: 373 yards
RECEIVING **Jesse Kroll: 866 yards**
TACKLES Kavon Frazier: 108
SACKS Blake Serpa: 3
INTERCEPTIONS **Tony Annese: 2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.4
FPI CHANCE CENTRAL MICHIGAN WINS

9/1 vs. Presbyterian 98% • **9/10** @ Oklahoma State 6% • **9/17** vs. UNLV 83% • **9/24** @ Virginia 31% • **10/1** vs. Western Michigan 40% • **10/8** vs. Ball State 81% • **10/15** @ Northern Illinois 41% • **10/22** @ Toledo 48% • **10/29** vs. Kent State 79% • **11/4** @ Miami (Ohio) 70% • **11/12** BYE • **11/15** vs. Ohio 78% • **11/22** @ Eastern Michigan 78%

3 Northern Illinois

COACH Rod Carey (4th season)
31–12 (0–4 in bowl games)

The Huskies have earned six straight MAC title-game berths. And with 12 starters back, including QB Drew Hare, they'll have a very real shot at a seventh. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Joel Bouagnon
The senior is a true workhorse: 283 rush attempts in 2015 (T8 in the FBS), with 18 TDs on the ground (T10).

X-FACTOR QB Drew Hare
Hare led the Huskies to a 2014 MAC title, threw 14 TDs to 4 INTs in 2015 ... then ruptured his Achilles in Week 10. From there, NIU went 2–3 to close out the year. "If he stays healthy, the outcome is different," coach Rod Carey says.

POSITION BATTLE Safety
Losing Marlon Moore to graduation is big. His likely subs, Mycial Allen and Elijah Campbell, must help CB Shawun Lurry shore up a suspect pass D (243.6 ypg allowed, No. 10 in the MAC).

THE PRESSER

NIU reached the end zone on 70.8 percent of red zone drives last year (No. 12 in the FBS), largely because Bouagnon opened up the pass game. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO STOP THE HUSKIES?** "You have to look for ways to slow down what they do best. Sometimes it could mean more support from the secondary in stopping the run. It could be movement, in terms of slanting people. It could mean blitzing." —MAC head coach

Lurry, who led the country with 9 INTs in 2015, is a true lockdown corner. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO PLAN FOR LURRY?** "Pick and choose the spots you go at him. Obviously, give him different looks so he doesn't settle in and get super aggressive." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–6 (6–2)
BOWL GAME San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl vs. Boise State, 55-7 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Drew Hare: 1,962 yards**
RUSHING **Joel Bouagnon: 1,285 yards**
RECEIVING **Kenny Golladay: 1,129 yards**
TACKLES Boomer Mays: 114
SACKS Perez Ford: 5
INTERCEPTIONS **Shawun Lurry: 9**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.4
FPI CHANCE NORTHERN ILLINOIS WINS

9/3 @ Wyoming **63%** ● **9/10** @ South Florida **20%** ● **9/17** vs. San Diego State **51%** ● **9/24** vs. Western Illinois **91%** ● **10/1** @ Ball State **70%** ● **10/8** @ Western Michigan **27%** ● **10/15** vs. Central Michigan **59%** ● **10/22** vs. Buffalo **84%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/1** vs. Bowling Green **68%** ● **11/9** vs. Toledo (Chicago) **57%** ● **11/16** @ Eastern Michigan **78%** ● **11/25** @ Kent State **66%**

4 Toledo

COACH Jason Candle (2nd season)
1–0 (1–0 in bowl games)

The Rockets lost Matt Campbell (35-15) to Iowa State, so OC Jason Candle leads UT's bid for back-to-back 10-win seasons. It won't come easy with a depleted D. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Kareem Hunt
Despite a drop in numbers (973 yards and 12 TDs in a 2015 time-share with Terry Swanson, compared with 1,631 yards and 16 scores in '14), Hunt is the main attraction. He rushed for 10-plus yards 27 times, No. 7 in the MAC.

X-FACTOR OT Storm Norton
Norton stars on a line that gave up five sacks last year, second fewest in the FBS. That stoutness will help ease in a new Rockets QB.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Logan Woodside started 10 games in '14, when he threw 19 TDs but with a 48.3 QBR. Michael Julian (26 career attempts) and redshirt freshman Mitchell Guadagni are in play too.

THE PRESSER

A solid receiving corps returns almost entirely intact: Four Toledo pass catchers who logged 17 TDs combined last year are back. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO PICK YOUR POISON VS. TOLEDO?** "You can't put eight or nine in the box against Kareem Hunt. If you leave guys on the island, they can beat you over the top." —MAC head coach

The Rockets gave up the MAC's fewest TDs in the air last year (15) but lose three of four D-line starters and five senior contributors in the secondary. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WORRIES ON THE D?** "UT does as good a job as anyone in our league at adjusting week to week. And it's always done an excellent job against us at throwing in wrinkles." —MAC defensive coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 10–2 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Marmot Boca Raton Bowl vs. Temple, 32-17 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Phillip Ely: 2,965 yards
RUSHING **Kareem Hunt: 973 yards**
RECEIVING **Cody Thompson: 825 yards**
TACKLES Chase Murdock: 88
SACKS Orion Jones: 6
INTERCEPTIONS Cheatham Norrils: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.1
FPI CHANCE TOLEDO WINS

9/3 @ Arkansas State **43%** ● **9/10** vs. Maine **95%** ● **9/17** vs. Fresno State **78%** ● **9/24** BYE ● **9/30** @ BYU **17%** ● **10/8** @ Eastern Michigan **74%** ● **10/15** vs. Bowling Green **61%** ● **10/22** vs. Central Michigan **53%** ● **10/27** vs. Ohio **74%** ● **11/2** @ Akron **66%** ● **11/9** vs. Northern Illinois (Chicago) **43%** ● **11/16** vs. Ball State **77%** ● **11/25** @ Western Michigan **24%**

5 Ball State

COACH Mike Neu (1st season)

Having limped to eight wins combined since 2014, the Cardinals turn to Mike Neu, a former Ball State star QB, to resuscitate a stagnant offense. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Sean Wiggins
On a downtrodden defense, one of three in the FBS to allow 2,700 rush yards and 3,500 pass yards, Wiggins emerged as a bright spot—10 tackles in three of his last four games.

X-FACTOR QB Riley Neal
After taking over in Week 3 as a true freshman, Neal showed both promise (five games completing 60-plus percent) and pitfalls (a 3-INT outing vs. Bowling Green).

POSITION BATTLE Running back
Darian Green (5.0 ypc) and James Gilbert (4.0 ypc) split carries down the middle, but for the Cardinals to improve their 90th-ranked rush attack, one must emerge as a go-to in '16.

THE PRESSER

Neal threw 16 TDs to 6 INTs last year, the fourth-best rate in the MAC—a league replete with solid QB play. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NEAL'S PROSPECTS FOR '16?** "They probably didn't throw a whole bunch of stuff on Neal's plate at the beginning, but he got better and better. When you've got a triggerman who can spread the ball to different players, you've got to play honest D." —MAC head coach

If there's cause for optimism on Ball State's porous defense (518.0 ypg), it's that nine returning starters can build on experience. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CARDS' DEFENSE?** "They're gap-sound. They're a snap-to-whistle D, and a team that plays like that always gives itself a chance." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3-9 (2-6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Riley Neal: 2,276 yards**
RUSHING **Darian Green: 730 yards**
RECEIVING Jordan Williams: 920 yards
TACKLES Ben Ingle: 102
SACKS **Anthony Winbush: 5**
INTERCEPTIONS **Tyree Holder: 2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7
FPI CHANCE BALL STATE WINS

9/2 @ Georgia State 37% • **9/10** @ Indiana 13% • **9/17** vs. Eastern Kentucky 79% • **9/24** @ Florida Atlantic 39% • **10/1** vs. Northern Illinois 31% • **10/8** @ Central Michigan 19% • **10/15** @ Buffalo 44% • **10/22** vs. Akron 60% • **10/29** BYE • **11/1** vs. Western Michigan 18% • **11/8** vs. Eastern Michigan 67% • **11/16** @ Toledo 23% • **11/22** @ Miami (Ohio) 41%

6 Eastern Michigan

COACH Chris Creighton (3rd season)
3-21 (0-0 in bowl games)

Three wins in two years is ... not ideal, but EMU ranked sixth in the MAC in ypp, seventh in rush ypg and eighth in pass ypg. Hey, it's cause for modest optimism. —A.O.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DL Pat O'Connor
Before sitting out all of last season with injury, O'Connor, one of the MAC's best down linemen, had 7½ sacks in 2014. All other Eagles defenders combined for 4½ that year.

X-FACTOR Ian Eriksen and Breck Turner
Half of EMU's one-two backfield punch departs, so Chris Creighton will try to pair either Eriksen or Turner, both with zero career carries, with last year's second-leading rusher, Shaq Vann.

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
A crop of redshirt freshmen—Isaac Holder, Braylin Collins, Dieuly Aristilde and Kezio Snelling—will join sophomore Eddie Daugherty in a group that has no real standout.

THE PRESSER

Daugherty was EMU's lone 500-yard receiver in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO STIFLE YOUNG TALENT?** "Play aggressively at the line of scrimmage and be physical—you have to slow down that athleticism. Even after the catch, be physical. A lot of younger players don't pay as much attention to detail, like route running." —MAC head coach

The Eagles finished dead last in the FBS in rush ypg allowed (316.5) but get back DL stars in O'Connor and Jeremiah Harris, who played a combined three games last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT EMU'S FRONT?** "You don't attack that point on the line of scrimmage, or you don't throw against it. You throw everywhere else." —MAC head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 1-11 (0-8)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Brogan Roback: 2,304 yards**
RUSHING Darius Jackson: 1,078 yards
RECEIVING **Eddie Daugherty: 557 yards**
TACKLES Great Ibe: 131
SACKS Clay Dawson: 5
INTERCEPTIONS **Kyle Rachwal: 1**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.0
FPI CHANCE EASTERN MICHIGAN WINS

9/3 vs. Mississippi Valley State 99% • **9/10** @ Missouri 6% • **9/17** @ Charlotte 51% • **9/23** vs. Wyoming 44% • **10/1** @ Bowling Green 18% • **10/8** vs. Toledo 26% • **10/15** @ Ohio 27% • **10/22** @ Western Michigan 7% • **10/29** vs. Miami (Ohio) 48% • **11/5** BYE • **11/8** @ Ball State 33% • **11/16** vs. Northern Illinois 22% • **11/22** vs. Central Michigan 22%

18 YEARS AND COUNTING

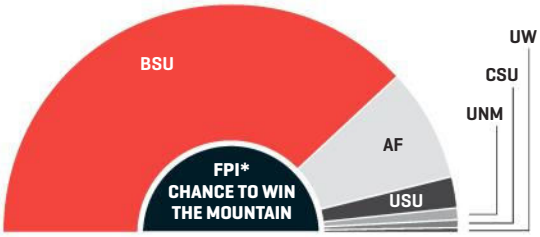
COVERING SPORTS SINCE 1998, ESPN THE MAGAZINE
FEATURES AWARD-WINNING COVERS OF ALL YOUR FAVORITE ATHLETES.

Buy your favorite cover TODAY | Go to ESPNMAG.COM/COVERS

ESPN
THE MAGAZINE

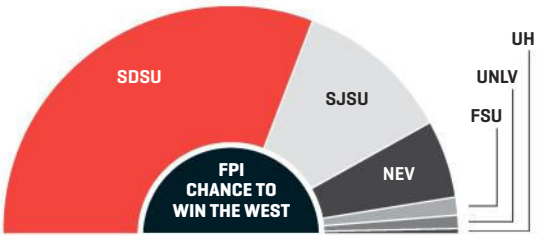
Mountain West outlook

MOUNTAIN	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
BOISE STATE	36	76.4%
AIR FORCE	68	16.0%
UTAH STATE	83	4.8%
NEW MEXICO	95	1.4%
COLORADO STATE	97	0.9%
WYOMING	101	0.5%



*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

WEST	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN DIVISION
SAN DIEGO STATE	60	61.9%
SAN JOSE STATE	77	22.3%
NEVADA	92	11.1%
FRESNO STATE	104	2.5%
UNLV	108	1.8%
HAWAII	117	0.5%



AVERAGE FPI RANK

86.5

PROJECTED CHAMPION

63%

BOISE STATE

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

RB	**Donnel Pumphrey**	Sr.	San Diego State

ALL-MOUNTAIN WEST

QB	**Brett Rypien**	So.	Boise State
RB	**Donnel Pumphrey**	Sr.	San Diego State
RB	**Jeremy McNichols**	Jr.	Boise State
WR	**Thomas Sperbeck**	Sr.	Boise State
WR	**Devonte Boyd**	Jr.	UNLV
TE	**Billy Freeman**	Sr.	San Jose State
OL	**Dejon Allen**	Jr.	Hawaii
OL	**Nico Siragusa**	Sr.	San Diego State
OL	**Fred Zerblis**	Sr.	Colorado State
OL	**Chase Roullier**	Sr.	Wyoming
OL	**Austin Corbett**	Jr.	Nevada

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

LB	**Calvin Munson**	Sr.	San Diego State

ALL-MOUNTAIN WEST

DE	**Ricky Ali'ifua**	Sr.	Utah State
DE	**Alex Barrett**	Sr.	San Diego State
DT	**Nik D'Avanzo**	Sr.	New Mexico
LB	**Tau Lotulelei**	Sr.	UNLV
LB	**Calvin Munson**	Sr.	San Diego State
LB	**Dakota Cox**	Sr.	New Mexico
LB	**Christian Tago**	Sr.	San Jose State
CB	**Dameon Baber**	So.	Nevada
CB	**Damontae Kazee**	Sr.	San Diego State
S	**Weston Steelhammer**	Jr.	Air Force
S	**Andrew Wingard**	So.	Wyoming

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Tyler Rausa**	Sr.	Boise State
P	**Hayden Hunt**	Sr.	Colorado State
RS	**Rashaad Penny**	Jr.	San Diego State

Jeremy McNichols

Boise State's back: McNichols' 5.8 ypc is the best career clip of any Broncos RB (minimum 150 attempts).

JOHN CORDES/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Boise State

COACH Bryan Harsin (3rd season)
21–6 (2–0 in bowl games)

After a "down" 2015 , the Broncos return eight offensive starters, restoring fans' optimism. Anything but a New Year's Six bowl will be unacceptable. —Carl Carchia

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Brett Rypien
The former four-star recruit—and nephew of Super Bowl–winning QB Mark Rypien—will try to build on his sensational freshman season (Mountain West–best 3,353 passing yards).

X-FACTOR CB Jonathan Moxey
With the departures of safety Darian Thompson and star CB Donte Deayon (9 INTs combined last year), the Broncos could use a breakout year from Moxey, who had two picks in '15.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive tackle
Boise State lost three D-line starters, so Matt Locher, a three-star recruit who redshirted last year, will compete with fellow redshirt freshman Sam Whitney and juco transfer Daniel Auelua.

THE PRESSER

Rypien excelled under pressure last year: seven TDs (second best in the MW) and 24 passes of 20-plus yards against the blitz (first). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT RYPIEN?** "He's a superstar. He makes all the throws, plus he's got a great feel for touch and knows when the ball has to come out." —Mountain West head coach

The Broncos' prolific passing offense (310.2 ypg, best in the league) brings back four of its top five receivers, led by all-conference senior Thomas Sperbeck (school-record 1,412 yards, eight TDs in 2015). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SPERBECK?** "Sperbeck is back? Shoot! I was hoping he wasn't. He's the key to stopping them; third-and-6, that's where the ball is going." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (5–3)
BOWL GAME San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl vs. Northern Illinois, 55-7 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Brett Rypien: 3,353 yards**
RUSHING **Jeremy McNichols: 1,337 yards**
RECEIVING **Thomas Sperbeck: 1,412 yards**
TACKLES **Ben Weaver: 68**
SACKS Kamalei Correa: 7
INTERCEPTIONS Darian Thompson: 5

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 10.4
FPI CHANCE BOISE STATE WINS

9/3 @ UL Lafayette **84%** • **9/10** vs. Washington State **64%** • **9/17** BYE • **9/24** @ Oregon State **74%** • **10/1** vs. Utah State **86%** • **10/7** @ New Mexico **84%** • **10/15** vs. Colorado State **92%** • **10/20** vs. BYU **68%** • **10/29** @ Wyoming **88%** • **11/4** vs. San Jose State **84%** • **11/12** @ Hawaii **89%** • **11/18** vs. UNLV **95%** • **11/25** @ Air Force **67%**

2 Air Force

COACH Troy Calhoun (10th season)
67–50 (3–5 in bowl games)

Who says Boise State owns the Mountain Division? Air Force won on the Smurf turf last year, took the division and is ready to defend it with 15 starters back. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Jacobi Owens
Owens, who is 1,466 yards from becoming Air Force's leading career rusher, is the hammer in the Falcons' triple-option. He averaged 99 ypg at fullback in the last eight games in '15.

X-FACTOR RB Timothy McVey
McVey ran for six touchdowns in the final three regular-season games last year and is a crucial member of the RB corps—especially if he has to step up for the oft-injured Owens.

POSITION BATTLE Center
The Falcons return just 40 starts along the offensive line. The two players vying for the center spot, sophomore Alex Norton and senior Dylan Vail, combine for just 14.

THE PRESSER

Air Force's perennially undersized defensive line ranked 31st in the FBS in TFLs (7.0 per game) and 19th in sacks (2.7 per game) in '15. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW THEY OVERCOME LACK OF SIZE?** "They are quick enough, and they slant and stunt well enough that it makes them hard to block, even when you have angles." —Mountain West head coach

The Falcons' top target when they throw (12.1 attempts per game) is Jalen Robinette, whose 24.7 ypc would have been among the nation's best had he qualified. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT COVERING ROBINETTE?** "I think he's the best receiver in the league. He's always one-on-one because of their offense, and ... he has all the advantages." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 8–6 (6–2)
BOWL GAME Lockheed Martin Armed Forces Bowl vs. California, 55-36 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Karson Roberts: 1,595 yards
RUSHING **Jacobi Owens: 1,092 yards**
RECEIVING **Jalen Robinette: 641 yards**
TACKLES **Weston Steelhammer: 80**
SACKS Alex Hansen: 7½
INTERCEPTIONS **Weston Steelhammer: 5**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.4
FPI CHANCE AIR FORCE WINS

9/3 vs. Abilene Christian **98%** • **9/10** vs. Georgia State **85%** • **9/17** BYE • **9/24** @ Utah State **55%** • **10/1** vs. Navy **67%** • **10/8** @ Wyoming **72%** • **10/15** vs. New Mexico **72%** • **10/22** vs. Hawaii **92%** • **10/28** @ Fresno State **72%** • **11/5** @ Army **64%** • **11/12** vs. Colorado State **79%** • **11/19** @ San Jose State **41%** • **11/25** vs. Boise State **33%**

3 Utah State

COACH Matt Wells (4th season)
25–16 (2–1 in bowl games)

The cruel truth for USU fans: Just when the Aggies have achieved stability at QB, they're dealing with a defensive overhaul. The offense will have to carry the load. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Kent Myers
Myers excelled last season in place of injured Chuckie Keeton: On Oct. 3, he gashed Colorado State for 191 yards rushing and 137 passing; on Nov. 14, he threw for 364 yards at Air Force.

X-FACTOR RB Devante Mays
The juco transfer, who finished the year by running for 124 yards on 12 carries in the bowl loss, has a chance to run for more than 1,000 yards behind four returning OL starters.

POSITION BATTLE Safety
Devin Centers, who started eight games as a junior and tied for the team lead in INTs, will compete for a bigger role this year with Jontrell Rocquemore and BYU transfer Dallin Leavitt.

THE PRESSER

USU is known for its attacking 3-4 D (111 sacks since '13, 11th most in the FBS), but its most experienced returner has just 13 career tackles. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LOSSES ON D?** "I thought last year they were going to take a step back, but they were just as good. They're transitioning to a more consistent program." —Mountain West head coach

The Aggies ran (481 rushes) more than they threw (403 passes) and gained nearly a yard more per carry than opponents (4.5 to 3.6). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR RUNNING GAME?** "Their offensive line is a veteran group—wide and long. Mays runs well inside. He's a big-play threat." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 (5–3)
BOWL GAME Famous Idaho Potato Bowl vs. Akron, 23-21 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Kent Myers: 1,593 yards**
RUSHING **Devante Mays: 966 yards**
RECEIVING Hunter Sharp: 835 yards
TACKLES Nick Vigil: 144
SACKS David Moala: 4½
INTERCEPTIONS **Devin Centers: 3**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.2
FPI CHANCE UTAH STATE WINS

9/1 vs. Weber State **96%** • **9/10** @ USC **5%** • **9/17** vs. Arkansas State **68%** • **9/24** vs. Air Force **45%** • **10/1** @ Boise State **14%** • **10/8** @ Colorado State **57%** • **10/15** BYE • **10/22** vs. Fresno State **81%** • **10/28** vs. San Diego State **47%** • **11/5** @ Wyoming **63%** • **11/12** vs. New Mexico **72%** • **11/19** @ Nevada **51%** • **11/26** @ BYU **21%**

4 New Mexico

COACH Bob Davie (5th season)
18–32 (0–1 in bowl games)

Thanks to a potent triple-option and an opportunistic defense, the Lobos last year reached their first bowl since 2007. Now the challenge is staying on the gas. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Teriyon Gipson
Gipson will get his chance to shine in the Lobos' run-heavy offense now that Jhurell Pressley is gone. The 5-foot-8, 182-pound senior ran for 850 yards and six TDs in a platoon last year.

X-FACTOR S Daniel Henry
Henry, a junior college transfer who redshirted in 2014, is part of an experienced secondary that needs to eliminate the big plays. He had 72 tackles and a sack last year.

POSITION BATTLE Center
Blaise Fountain, a 6-foot, 280-pound juco transfer, seems to have won coach Bob Davie's favor this spring, so he'll compete with senior Garrett Adcock, who has 19 career starts at right tackle.

THE PRESSER

With a triple-option run out of the pistol formation, New Mexico ranked ninth in the FBS with 252.2 rushing ypg in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE LOBOS' VERSION OF THE OPTION?** "They find all sorts of different ways to end up in a triple-option look, but at the end of the day it's still stop the dive, the QB and the pitch." —Mountain West head coach

The Lobos' 3-3-5 defense was 24th in the FBS with 25 takeaways but gave up big plays (75 plays of 20-plus yards, 17th most in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEIR AGGRESSIVE D?** "It's feast or famine. If a guy doesn't get into a gap, you have a chance for a home run." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (5–3)
BOWL GAME Gildan New Mexico Bowl vs. Arizona, 45-37 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Lamar Jordan: 1,045 yards**
RUSHING Jhurell Pressley: 907 yards
RECEIVING **Dameon Gamblin: 424 yards**
TACKLES **Dakota Cox: 97**
SACKS **Maurice Daniels: 5½**
INTERCEPTIONS Cranston Jones: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0
FPI CHANCE NEW MEXICO WINS

9/3 vs. South Dakota **89%** • **9/10** @ New Mexico State **68%** • **9/17** @ Rutgers **21%** • **9/24** BYE • **10/1** vs. San Jose State **45%** • **10/7** vs. Boise State **16%** • **10/15** @ Air Force (Dallas) **28%** • **10/22** vs. UL Monroe **86%** • **10/29** @ Hawaii **50%** • **11/5** vs. Nevada **52%** • **11/12** @ Utah State **28%** • **11/19** @ Colorado State **43%** • **11/26** vs. Wyoming **66%**

5 Colorado State

COACH Mike Bobo (2nd season)
7–6 (0–1 in bowl games)

CSU's 10-win 2014 seems like ages ago: The Rams return just 10 starters and must somehow replace all-everything wideout Rashard Higgins. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Izzy Matthews
Matthews, a physical downhill runner, rushed for 590 yards on just 97 carries in 2015. The 6-foot, 215-pound sophomore averaged 6.5 yards per carry over the final five games.

X-FACTOR WR Xavier Williams
The Rams lost four leading receivers and TEs who combined for almost 2,000 yards in '15. Williams, who had 19 catches for 231 yards last year, must help take pressure off the rush.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Junior Nick Stevens wasn't terrible (21 TDs, 12 INTs), but he has competition from Faton Bauta, a dual-threat grad transfer who played under coach Mike Bobo at Georgia.

THE PRESSER

Bobo's power-run offense surged thanks to Matthews, a sophomore who helped Colorado State average a whopping 251 rush yards in the final five games of '15. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MATTHEWS?** "You have to gang-tackle him. He's strong and usually makes a guy miss. He does a good job of advancing after first contact." —Mountain West head coach

The Rams must find three D-line starters for the new 3-4 scheme, but they return their top three LBs, led by senior Kevin Davis (14 TFLs). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DAVIS?** "You have to be aware of where he is. You make sure you're not in the wrong one-on-one matchup with him." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (5–3)
BOWL GAME Nova Home Loans Arizona Bowl vs. Nevada, 28-23 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Nick Stevens: 2,679 yards**
RUSHING **Dalyn Dawkins: 867 yards**
RECEIVING Rashard Higgins: 1,062 yards
TACKLES **Kevin Davis: 101**
SACKS Joe Kawulok: 5½
INTERCEPTIONS Deandre Elliot: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.5
FPI CHANCE COLORADO STATE WINS

9/2 vs. Colorado (Denver) **23%** ● **9/10** vs. UTSA **85%** ● **9/17** vs. Northern Colorado **96%** ● **9/24** @ Minnesota **16%** ● **10/1** vs. Wyoming **63%** ● **10/8** vs. Utah State **43%** ● **10/15** @ Boise State **8%** ● **10/22** @ UNLV **50%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Fresno State **70%** ● **11/12** @ Air Force **21%** ● **11/19** vs. New Mexico **57%** ● **11/26** @ San Diego State **17%**

6 Wyoming

COACH Craig Bohl (3rd season)
6–18 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Cowboys just missed a school-record 11 losses in '15, but they played 26 freshmen and lacked stability at QB. With 18 starters back, 2016 should be a step up. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Brian Hill
Last year Hill led the conference in rush ypg (135.9) yet found himself less heralded than other MW RBs. With a chip on his shoulder and 10 added pounds of muscle, watch out.

X-FACTOR LB Lucas Wacha
The Cowboys run the Tampa 2 scheme, which requires excellent play from the MLB. Wacha, a 6-foot-1,230-pound senior who was second on the team with 96 tackles, must step up.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Sophomores Josh Allen and Nick Smith both looked good in limited play behind Cam Coffman last year. Whichever QB wins the job will be Wyoming's third starter in the past three years.

THE PRESSER

The Cowboys' pro-style offense is built around Hill, who ranked ninth in the FBS with a school-record 1,631 rush yards. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HILL?** "He's an incredibly talented downhill runner. You have to get him going east and west, and you have to gang-tackle him." —Mountain West head coach

An inexperienced secondary must improve to make up for a pass rush that was second worst in the FBS (10 sacks). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE YOUNG DBs?** "I think there'll be dramatic improvement. The free safety [Andrew Wingard] is as good as any. When you watch them on film, you can tell there's some athletic ability." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2–10 (2–6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Cameron Coffman: 1,951 yards
RUSHING **Brian Hill: 1,631 yards**
RECEIVING **Tanner Gentry: 678 yards**
TACKLES **Andrew Wingard: 122**
SACKS Eddie Yarbrough: 7
INTERCEPTIONS **Marcus Epps: 2**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4
FPI CHANCE WYOMING WINS

9/3 vs. Northern Illinois **37%** ● **9/10** @ Nebraska **5%** ● **9/17** vs. UC Davis **94%** ● **9/23** @ Eastern Michigan **56%** ● **10/1** @ Colorado State **37%** ● **10/8** vs. Air Force **28%** ● **10/15** BYE ● **10/22** @ Nevada **33%** ● **10/29** vs. Boise State **12%** ● **11/5** vs. Utah State **37%** ● **11/12** @ UNLV **41%** ● **11/19** vs. San Diego State **27%** ● **11/26** @ New Mexico **34%**

1 San Diego State

COACH Rocky Long (6th season)
43–23 (2–3 in bowl games)

SDSU's run of nine straight wins led to its first outright conference title since 1986. The run-first squad returns offensive stars, but the defense has question marks. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Donnel Pumphrey
The 5-foot-9, 180-pound senior ran for 17 TDs in '15 and keys the Aztecs' offense. Pumphrey has an FBS-best 4,272 rush yards since '13.

X-FACTOR Defensive tackle
Replacing Christian Heyward (5½ TFLs) is critical. Sophomore Noble Hall (6 TFLs as a backup) and junior Sergio Phillips, who has shuttled back and forth from the OL, are in the mix.

POSITION BATTLE Right tackle
It won't make headlines, but losing All-MW RT Pearce Slater is huge for the seventh-most run-heavy team in the FBS. Sophs Joe Salcedo, who saw limited reps, and Ryan Pope, a scout-teamer, have their work cut out for them.

THE PRESSER

Led by LB Calvin Munson (15 TFLs) and CB Damontae Kazee (8 INTs), the Aztecs notched the second-most takeaways (34) in the FBS last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D?** "Those guys [Munson and Kazee] are great, but they don't rely on one guy. There's so many athletes on the field." —Mountain West head coach

Sophomore QB Christian Chapman impressed in his only start (203 yards, one TD), but SDSU threw the seventh-fewest passes last year, so he won't be asked to do much. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT FACING CHAPMAN?** "This isn't to offend him, but when you go against San Diego State, you first say, 'How are we going to stop the run game?'" —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11–3 (8–0)
BOWL GAME Hawaii Bowl vs. Cincinnati, 42-7 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Maxwell Smith: 1,529 yards
RUSHING **Donnel Pumphrey: 1,653 yards**
RECEIVING **Mikah Holder: 439 yards**
TACKLES **Calvin Munson: 98**
SACKS **Calvin Munson: 9½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Damontae Kazee: 8**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.9
FPI CHANCE SAN DIEGO STATE WINS

9/3 vs. New Hampshire **96%** • **9/10** vs. California **44%** • **9/17** @ Northern Illinois **49%** • **9/24** BYE • **10/1** @ South Alabama **85%** • **10/8** vs. UNLV **87%** • **10/14** @ Fresno State **75%** • **10/21** vs. San Jose State **67%** • **10/28** @ Utah State **54%** • **11/5** vs. Hawaii **92%** • **11/12** @ Nevada **63%** • **11/19** @ Wyoming **73%** • **11/26** vs. Colorado State **83%**

2 San Jose State

COACH Ron Caragher (4th season)
15–22 (1–0 in bowl games)

With 15 starters back and the maturation of a strong 2015 recruiting class (2nd in the Mountain West), SJSU could build on last year's three-win improvement. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON TE Billy Freeman
The Spartans lost playmaking RB Tyler Ervin, so Freeman (586 yards, six TDs) will be even more crucial. SJSU was 16th in TE targets in '15, and the senior nearly tripled his catch total (48) with the emergence of QB Kenny Potter.

X-FACTOR WR Bailey Gaither
SJSU desperately needs someone who can stretch the field; Gaither, a redshirt freshman who runs a 4.49 40, had a strong spring.

POSITION BATTLE Defensive end
The Spartans' defensive line ranked 122nd in tackles for loss (4.3 per game), so SJSU needs better production from seniors Isaiah Irving and Eugene Taylor, one of whom will start.

THE PRESSER

The team's West Coast offense ranked 10th nationally in third-down efficiency (47.5 percent) and 18th in red zone efficiency (69.6 percent). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT DEFENDING THE OFFENSE?** "You have to do a really good job of first-down defense. If they're always in second-and-medium, that's when they take their shots and run reverses." —Mountain West head coach

SJSU boasted the nation's second-best pass defense (157.8 ypg), but teams won't throw if the run D doesn't improve (200.8 ypg). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE?** "When you're running the football with a lot of success, if you're halfway intelligent, you know you don't have to throw it." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 (4–4)
BOWL GAME AutoNation Cure Bowl vs. Georgia State, 27-16 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Kenny Potter: 1,984 yards**
RUSHING Tyler Ervin: 1,601 yards
RECEIVING **Billy Freeman: 586 yards**
TACKLES **Christian Tago: 125**
SACKS **Eugene Taylor: 3**
INTERCEPTIONS Cleveland Wallace III: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.8
FPI CHANCE SAN JOSE STATE WINS

9/3 @ Tulsa **39%** • **9/10** vs. Portland State **92%** • **9/17** vs. Utah **30%** • **9/24** @ Iowa State **35%** • **10/1** @ New Mexico **55%** • **10/8** vs. Hawaii **89%** • **10/15** vs. Nevada **71%** • **10/21** @ San Diego State **33%** • **10/29** vs. UNLV **83%** • **11/4** @ Boise State **16%** • **11/12** BYE • **11/19** vs. Air Force **59%** • **11/26** @ Fresno State **69%**

3 Nevada

COACH Brian Polian (4th season)
18–20 (1–1 in bowl games)

What do you get when you mix a Chip Kelly-style attack led by new OC Tim Cramsey and nine starters returning from last season's pistol offense? We'll see. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB James Butler
Butler, a 5-foot-9, 200-pound junior who led the conference with 6.5 ypc, will still get the majority of carries, even with former Penn State starter and grad transfer Akeel Lynch in town.

X-FACTOR QB Tyler Stewart
Nevada had two tailbacks run for more than 1,000 yards but ranked 113th in passing (164.5). Stewart, a first-time starter as a junior, was 96th in yards per attempt (6.6).

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
The Pack must replace all three LBs. Juco transfer Austin Paulhus is battling redshirt freshman Gabe Sewell, a touted recruit who turned down Colorado, to man the middle.

THE PRESSER

Cramsey, a Chip Kelly disciple who ran the Montana State offense the past three years, will try to inject life into an O that posted its lowest scoring output since 2003 (26.2 ppg). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT NEVADA'S NEW O?** "Cramsey is from the Chip Kelly lineage, so there'll be misdirection, a lot of motion, probably some tempo." —Mountain West head coach

The Wolf Pack won't ditch the pistol entirely: Butler likes running out of the formation. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT STOPPING BUTLER OUT OF THE PISTOL?** "You can't tackle him one-on-one. You have to have enough guys at the line so there aren't any gaps for him to run through." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 7–6 (4–4)
BOWL GAME Nova Home Loans Arizona Bowl vs. Colorado State, 28-23 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Tyler Stewart: 2,139 yards**
RUSHING **James Butler: 1,342 yards**
RECEIVING **Jerico Richardson: 750 yards**
TACKLES **Asauni Rufus: 105**
SACKS Ian Seau: 10
INTERCEPTIONS **Dameon Baber: 6**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.0
FPI CHANCE NEVADA WINS

9/3 vs. Cal Poly 88% • **9/10** @ Notre Dame 4% • **9/17** vs. Buffalo 77% • **9/24** @ Purdue 19% • **10/1** @ Hawaii 53% • **10/8** vs. Fresno State 70% • **10/15** @ San Jose State 29% • **10/22** vs. Wyoming 67% • **10/29** BYE • **11/5** @ New Mexico 48% • **11/12** vs. San Diego State 37% • **11/19** vs. Utah State 49% • **11/26** @ UNLV 57%

4 Fresno State

COACH Tim DeRuyter (5th season)
29–23 (0–3 in bowl games)

A new offensive coordinator and seven returning starters hope to rescue an attack that plummeted from third in the nation in 2013 to 121st in 2015. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Jamire Jordan
The 5-foot-10, 168-pound sophomore led the team in every receiving category (46/540/5) but must make better use of his targets; he caught only 47.9 percent of the 96 balls thrown his way.

X-FACTOR OC Eric Kiesau
An analyst at Alabama in 2015 and former OC at Washington, Kansas and Colorado, Kiesau helped install the Tide's up-tempo attack.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Sophomores Chason Virgil and Kilton Anderson are battling to put an end to the merry-go-round (five starters since Derek Carr left in '13). Anderson finished the year strong, but Virgil is the more highly regarded prospect.

THE PRESSER

Fresno State's pass-happy offense sputtered with four different starting QBs and finished 107th in the FBS (178.3 ypg). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE STRUGGLING PASSING GAME?** "They yanked [guys] so much. I don't even think they knew on Monday who the guy was going to be." —Mountain West head coach

The Bulldogs had 21 players who made their first career start in '15. That youth showed on defense, where they ranked 116th in rush yards allowed (234.7) and 115th in rush TDs (32). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D?** "They are extremely aggressive. When you're youthful and you play that defense, you're going to give up a lot of big plays." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (2–6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Zack Greenlee: 866 yards
RUSHING Marteze Waller: 920 yards
RECEIVING **Jamire Jordan: 540 yards**
TACKLES Ejiro Ederaine: 99
SACKS Ejiro Ederaine: 9
INTERCEPTIONS **Tyquwan Glass: 4**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.4
FPI CHANCE FRESNO STATE WINS

9/3 @ Nebraska 4% • **9/10** vs. Sacramento State 95% • **9/17** @ Toledo 22% • **9/24** vs. Tulsa 35% • **10/1** @ UNLV 44% • **10/8** @ Nevada 30% • **10/14** vs. San Diego State 25% • **10/22** @ Utah State 19% • **10/28** vs. Air Force 29% • **11/5** @ Colorado State 30% • **11/12** BYE • **11/19** vs. Hawaii 75% • **11/26** vs. San Jose State 31%

5 UNLV

COACH Tony Sanchez (2nd season)
3–9 (0–0 in bowl games)

A year removed from coaching a local high school, Tony Sanchez (85-5 at Bishop Gorman High) has given the Rebels cause for optimism. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Devonte Boyd
The Mountain West's freshman of the year in 2014 hauled in 54 passes for 904 yards and seven TDs as a sophomore and ranked second in the conference with 16.7 yards per catch.

X-FACTOR MLB Brian Keyes
The Rebels' rush defense gave up 217.5 ypg in 2015, so the arrival of Keyes, a 6-foot-1, 255-pound juco transfer, is welcomed.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Kurt Palandech appeared in 11 games last year but finished with a QBR of 39.4. That opens the door for juco transfer Johnny Stanton, a dual threat who had offers from California, Oregon and Wisconsin.

THE PRESSER

Sanchez's arrival led to a 66-spot jump in rush offense (193.7 ypg) and a 38-spot bump in scoring offense (28.6 ppg). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SANCHEZ'S YEAR 1 IMPACT?** "I think he has excited that program and that town about football. I thought he brought in some great assistants. I say arrow up for UNLV." —Mountain West head coach

Palandech, who passed for 794 yards and ran for 293 in '15, will compete with Stanton for the QB spot. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT PALANDECH?** "Kurt can hurt you with his legs. He's scary that way. Is he going to beat you consistently with his arm? I remember we didn't think so." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (2–6)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Blake Decker: 1,713 yards
RUSHING **Keith Whitely: 711 yards**
RECEIVING **Devonte Boyd: 904 yards**
TACKLES **Ryan McAleenan: 85**
SACKS **Tau Lotulelei: 3**
INTERCEPTIONS **Tim Hough: 4**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.7
FPI CHANCE UNLV WINS

9/1 vs. Jackson State 98% • **9/10** @ UCLA 3% • **9/17** @ Central Michigan 18% • **9/24** vs. Idaho 66% • **10/1** vs. Fresno State 56% • **10/8** @ San Diego State 13% • **10/15** @ Hawaii 40% • **10/22** vs. Colorado State 50% • **10/29** @ San Jose State 18% • **11/5** BYE • **11/12** vs. Wyoming 59% • **11/18** @ Boise State 5% • **11/26** vs. Nevada 43%

6 Hawaii

COACH Nick Rolovich (1st season)

Nick Rolovich returns to Hawaii, where he was a star QB (2000-01) and revered assistant (2008-11), after four seasons as the OC at Mountain West rival Nevada. —C.C.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Paul Harris
Harris tied a school record with four straight 100-yard games en route to becoming Hawaii's second 1,000-yard rusher since 1992.

X-FACTOR LB Jahlani Tavai
Tavai started 11 games and had three sacks at OLB as a redshirt freshman. Rolovich has called the 6-foot-4, 235-pound sophomore "a name the league will know in the next few years."

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Ikaika Woolsey, Beau Reilly and Aaron Zwahlen will fight for the starting job—Zwahlen, an ESPN 300 recruit who returned from a two-year mission last year, might have the edge.

THE PRESSER

The OL returns four starters, and the rush attack finished strong, averaging 215 yards over the final three games. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE O-LINE?** "I think protection-wise they weren't as good as they were in the run game, but most teams make a leap when they have guys back." —Mountain West head coach

Rolovich's newly hired OC, Zak Hill, left for Boise State just 48 days in, so the job has been divvied up among his staff. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE CHANGE IN PHILOSOPHY?** "I'm not sure [what to expect]. They had very good balance. They found ways to create a running game while also spreading you out and throwing the ball." —Mountain West head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–10 (0–8)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Max Wittek: 1,542 yards
RUSHING **Paul Harris: 1,132 yards**
RECEIVING **Marcus Kemp: 563 yards**
TACKLES Julian Gener: 95
SACKS **Kennedy Tulimasealii: 3½**
INTERCEPTIONS **Dany Mulanga: 1**

SCHEDULE

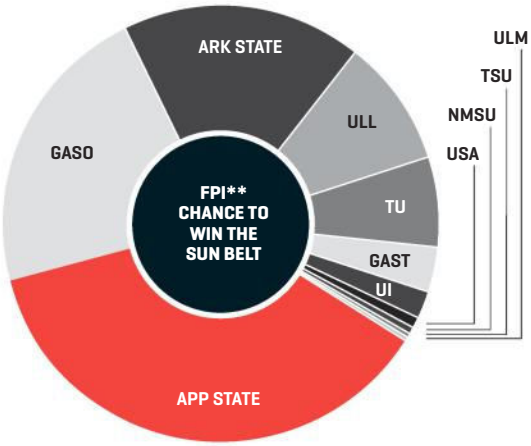
FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.1
FPI CHANCE HAWAII WINS

8/27 vs. California (Sydney, Australia) 13% • **9/3** @ Michigan 1% • **9/10** vs. Tennessee-Martin 85% • **9/17** @ Arizona 3% • **9/24** BYE • **10/1** vs. Nevada 47% • **10/8** @ San Jose State 11% • **10/15** vs. UNLV 60% • **10/22** @ Air Force 9% • **10/29** vs. New Mexico 50% • **11/5** @ San Diego State 8% • **11/12** vs. Boise State 11% • **11/19** @ Fresno State 25% • **11/26** vs. Massachusetts 83%

SUN BELT

Sun Belt outlook

	FPI RANK	CHANCE TO WIN CONFERENCE*
APPALACHIAN STATE	67	57.1%
GEORGIA SOUTHERN	81	33.1%
ARKANSAS STATE	88	27.2%
UL LAFAYETTE	98	13.6%
TROY	96	10.4%
GEORGIA STATE	103	5.4%
IDAHO	118	3.4%
SOUTH ALABAMA	120	1.0%
NEW MEXICO STATE	121	0.5%
TEXAS STATE	126	0.3%
UL MONROE	127	0.2%



*Percentages add up to more than 100 because the Sun Belt doesn't play a title game or break first-place ties. FPI projects a team's likelihood of having at least a share of first place.

**For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

AVERAGE FPI RANK

104.1

PROJECTED CHAMPION

57%

APPALACHIAN STATE

PRESEASON HONORS

OFFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

RB	**Larry Rose III**	Jr.	New Mexico State

ALL-SUN BELT

QB	**Taylor Lamb**	Jr.	Appalachian State
RB	**Matt Breida**	Sr.	Georgia Southern
RB	**Larry Rose III**	Jr.	New Mexico State
WR	**Robert Davis**	Sr.	Georgia State
WR	**Penny Hart**	So.	Georgia State
TE	**Gerald Everett**	Sr.	South Alabama
OL	**Andy Kwon**	Sr.	Georgia Southern
OL	**Parker Collins**	Sr.	Appalachian State
OL	**Antonio Garcia**	Sr.	Troy
OL	**Jemar Clark**	Sr.	Arkansas State
OL	**Colton Jackson**	Sr.	Arkansas State

DEFENSE

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

DE	**Ja'Von Rolland-Jones**	Jr.	Arkansas State

ALL-SUN BELT

DE	**Ja'Von Rolland-Jones**	Jr.	Arkansas State
DE	**Bernard Dawson**	Sr.	Georgia Southern
DT	**Jay Ellison**	Sr.	Georgia Southern
DL	**Stody Bradley**	Jr.	New Mexico State
LB	**John Law**	Sr.	Appalachian State
LB	**Eric Boggs**	Jr.	Appalachian State
LB	**Xavier Woodson-Luster**	Sr.	Arkansas State
CB	**Latrell Gibbs**	Jr.	Appalachian State
CB	**Jeremy Reaves**	Jr.	South Alabama
S	**Cody Brown**	Sr.	Arkansas State
S	**Savion Brown**	Sr.	UL Lafayette

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	**Austin Rehkow**	Sr.	Idaho
P	**Austin Rehkow**	Sr.	Idaho
RS	**Blaise Taylor**	Jr.	Arkansas State

Larry Rose III

Don't sleep on the Aggies dynamo, who led all Group of 5 rushers with 137.6 ypg, good for seventh in the FBS.

ANDRES LEIGHTON/AP IMAGES

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOSUE EVILLA

1 Appalachian State

COACH Scott Satterfield (4th season)
22–15 (1–0 in bowl games)

What would top an 11-win effort in App State's second year of FBS play? Try a Sun Belt title in its third. A loaded backfield and stingy D could help it get there. —Max Tyler

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Marcus Cox
The 5-foot-10, 200-pound senior ran for fewer than 75 yards just once last year (a 74-yard effort vs. Arkansas State) and will try for his fourth straight 1,000-yard season.

X-FACTOR RB Jalin Moore
Moore made a midseason start with an injured Cox sidelined—and gained 244 yards. His 7.4 yards per carry on the season was second best in the Sun Belt.

POSITION BATTLE Cornerback
App State boasts one of the league's best DBs in Latrell Gibbs (two pick-sixes in 2015), but it needs a complement to emerge in either Tae Hayes, Mondo Williams or Brandon Pinckney.

THE PRESSER

QB Taylor Lamb was quietly solid in '15 (70.3 QBR) but proved capable of fireworks too: He led the Sun Belt in TD passes of 20-plus yards (15). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT LAMB DOES BEST?** "He benefits from a great run game with Cox, so you see a lot of explosive throws based off of play-action. He throws the deep ball really well." —Sun Belt head coach

The pass defense bottled up big plays in 2015, allowing just 85 throws of 10-plus yards, ninth fewest in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT WORKS VS. THE D?** "If you're one-dimensional, they can eat you up. Being able to throw the ball effectively and staying really up-tempo are the two main things against them." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 11–2 (7–1)
BOWL GAME Raycom Media Camellia Bowl vs. Ohio, 31-29 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Taylor Lamb: 2,387 yards**
RUSHING **Marcus Cox: 1,423 yards**
RECEIVING Simms McElfresh: 466 yards
TACKLES **Eric Boggs: 104**
SACKS Ronald Blair: 7½
INTERCEPTIONS **Latrell Gibbs: 7**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 8.2
FPI CHANCE APPALACHIAN STATE WINS

9/3 @ Tennessee 5% • **9/10** vs. Old Dominion 87% • **9/17** vs. Miami (Fla.) 27% • **9/24** @ Akron 78% • **10/1** vs. Georgia State 82% • **10/8** BYE • **10/12** @ UL Lafayette 66% • **10/22** vs. Idaho 91% • **10/27** @ Georgia Southern 52% • **11/5** vs. Texas State 94% • **11/12** @ Troy 67% • **11/19** vs. UL Monroe 94% • **11/26** @ New Mexico State 83% • **12/3** BYE

2 Georgia Southern

COACH Tyson Summers (1st season)

New coach Tyson Summers won't overhaul a triple-option that's not broken—363.0 rush ypg, best in the FBS—especially with the five top rushers back in 2016. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON LB Ironhead Gallon
The Eagles lose a disruptor in LB Antwione Williams (10½ TFLs) but will look to Gallon (don't call him Deshawntee) to uphold a stingy front: 131.8 rush ypg allowed, No. 2 in the Sun Belt.

X-FACTOR RB Wesley Fields
It's a pick-your-poison backfield. Fields, a third option, complements the league's steadiest runner, teammate Matt Breida (7.9 ypc, No. 1 in the Sun Belt), with 6.8 ypc (No. 4).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Both members of last year's QB tandem return, and while Kevin Ellison and Favian Upshaw are prolific runners (1,295 yards in '15), they combined for more INTs (10) than pass TDs (four).

THE PRESSER

Behind Breida, the Eagles were outrushed just twice last year, while 30.6 percent of their carries went for a first down or TD (No. 9 in the FBS). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT A WINNING FORMULA VS. THE TRIPLE-OPTION?** "Last year we were able to contain their running game playing gap-sound football while running the ball ourselves. If you can outrush them, that's huge." —Sun Belt head coach

Gone are five DBs who combined for 76 percent of the team's pass breakups in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THOSE HOLES?** "You try to get matchups on guys you feel can't do something. If a guy has a problem transitioning out of his backpedal, then you'll isolate him one-on-one." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (6–2)
BOWL GAME GoDaddy Bowl vs. Bowling Green, 58-27 W
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Kevin Ellison: 597 yards**
RUSHING **Matt Breida: 1,608 yards**
RECEIVING **BJ Johnson III: 249 yards**
TACKLES Antwione Williams: 107
SACKS **Bernard Dawson: 4**
INTERCEPTIONS Antonio Glover: 6

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.1
FPI CHANCE GEORGIA SOUTHERN WINS

9/3 vs. Savannah State 99% • **9/10** @ South Alabama 78% • **9/17** vs. UL Monroe 92% • **9/24** @ Western Michigan 25% • **10/1** BYE • **10/5** @ Arkansas State 49% • **10/15** @ Georgia Tech 23% • **10/22** @ New Mexico State 77% • **10/27** vs. Appalachian State 48% • **11/5** @ Ole Miss 5% • **11/10** vs. UL Lafayette 74% • **11/19** @ Georgia State 65% • **11/26** BYE • **12/3** vs. Troy 76%

3 Arkansas State

COACH Blake Anderson (3rd season)
16–10 (0–2 in bowl games)

No leading passer, rusher or receiver coming back? No problem. The Sun Belt's standard-bearer (four of the past five conference titles) has stockpiled speed again. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE Ja'Von Rolland-Jones
All-Sun Belt as a sophomore, the 6-foot-2, 231-pounder had nine sacks (one each against USC and Missouri) and forced four fumbles.

X-FACTOR WR Cameron Echols-Luper
The speedy get speedier thanks to TCU transfer (and track star) Echols-Luper. He ran back four punts for 20-plus yards in '14 (T13 in the FBS).

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
It's a three-man race among sophomore James Tabary, who was hot and cold as the No. 2 last year; former ESPN 300 Oklahoma signee Justice Hansen, a mobile pro-style sophomore; and Cameron Birse, an improving but inconsistent junior.

THE PRESSER

The O-line has two All-Sun Belt veterans and must mask a hemorrhaging of skill-spot weapons. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE TRENCH PLAY?** "They get you out on the edge and the QB runs, so you've got to get the offensive line thinking to slow it down. Show blitz from one side and bring it from the other." —Sun Belt head coach

Don't expect to get away with turning the ball over. ASU led the nation in points off TOs (144). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO AVOID GETTING BURNED?** "They're extremely fast and pressure the QB, causing bad throws. Counter that by avoiding bad decisions. Go ahead and take a sack or throw the ball away instead of forcing it." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 9–4 (8–0)
BOWL GAME R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl vs. Louisiana Tech, 47-28 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Fredi Knighten: 1,835 yards
RUSHING Michael Gordon: 1,057 yards
RECEIVING Tres Hudson: 615 yards
TACKLES **Khari Lain: 81**
SACKS **Ja'Von Rolland-Jones: 9**
INTERCEPTIONS Rocky Hayes: 6

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 7.3
FPI CHANCE ARKANSAS STATE WINS

9/3 vs. Toledo 57% • **9/10** @ Auburn 7% • **9/17** @ Utah State 32% • **9/24** vs. Central Arkansas 90% • **10/1** BYE • **10/5** vs. Georgia Southern 51% • **10/15** vs. South Alabama 82% • **10/22** BYE • **10/29** vs. UL Monroe 90% • **11/3** @ Georgia State 57% • **11/12** vs. New Mexico State 84% • **11/17** @ Troy 50% • **11/26** @ UL Lafayette 51% • **12/3** @ Texas State 78%

4 UL Lafayette

COACH Mark Hudspeth (6th season)
40–24* (4–0 in bowl games)

After four straight 9-4 campaigns, the Ragin' Cajuns limped to four wins in 2015. Shoring up shaky play up front—on both sides—is the first order of business. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Elijah McGuire
Even with limited outside weapons to draw defenders out of the box, McGuire ran for 13 TDs and caught three more. In all, he gained 30 percent of the Ragin' Cajuns' offensive yards.

X-FACTOR CB Simeon Thomas
Eligibility issues have kept Thomas off the field since his 2013 freshman season (nine games, two pass breakups), but Mark Hudspeth tabs him as one of the team's standout tacklers.

POSITION BATTLE Guard
A new face in the interior—redshirt frosh Robert Hunt, who took starting reps in the spring—will look to solidify an O-line that afforded McGuire little breathing room last year.

THE PRESSER

A three-QB carousel spun all last year (6.5 ypa, No. 100 in the FBS), but Brooks Haack transferred and Jalen Nixon shifted to running back. So the last QB standing from the 2015 merry-go-round, soph Jordan Davis, will take on redshirt freshman Chris Weaver for starting reps. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE OFFENSIVE GAME PLAN?** "They try to run the ball down your throat. You have to make them throw the ball to win." —Sun Belt head coach

ULL's 73.4 defensive QBR ranked ninth in the league last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PASS D?** "Be up-tempo and try to get into one-on-ones. Every time you can get them into man coverage, if you can take a deep shot, that's profitable." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4–8 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Brooks Haack: 1,407 yards
RUSHING **Elijah McGuire: 1,058 yards**
RECEIVING Jamal Robinson: 824 yards
TACKLES Dominique Tovell: 79
SACKS Dominique Tovell: 7
INTERCEPTIONS **Savion Brown: 3**

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.2
FPI CHANCE UL LAFAYETTE WINS

9/3 vs. Boise State 17% • **9/10** vs. McNeese State 82% • **9/17** vs. South Alabama 78% • **9/24** @ Tulane 51% • **10/1** @ New Mexico State 65% • **10/8** BYE • **10/12** vs. Appalachian State 34% • **10/22** @ Texas State 73% • **10/29** BYE • **11/5** vs. Idaho 76% • **11/10** @ Georgia Southern 26% • **11/19** @ Georgia 3% • **11/26** vs. Arkansas State 49% • **12/3** @ UL Monroe 71%

*Adjusted to 18–24 by NCAA

5 Troy

COACH Neal Brown (2nd season)
4–8 (0–0 in bowl games)

A friendly slate—just one Power 5 tilt and Sun Belt heavyweights Appalachian State and Arkansas State at home—could bolster the win column. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON DE Rashad Dillard
After a medical redshirt (hip) in 2014, Dillard made 9 TFLs, second most on the team last year. He must maintain that play in '16 without disruptive DE Tyler Roberts at the other end.

X-FACTOR QB Brandon Silvers
He completed 61.2 percent of his passes in '15 (No. 3 in the Sun Belt) but flatlined in close games: 5 INTs in six- and three-point losses to South Alabama and Appalachian State.

POSITION BATTLE Offensive line
The interior failed to get push last year—see Troy's 119.1 rush ypg—so despite returners with starting reps (Xavier Fields, Deontae Crumitie at guard), spots are up for grabs.

THE PRESSER

Silvers connected with four wideouts for three-plus TDs each last year. Only junior Emanuel Thompson is back, so new targets will get looks. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SILVERS?** "He can distribute the football. You've got to try to create confusion for him whenever he is throwing." —Sun Belt head coach

The D turned around in a big way, registering 29 sacks (12 more than 2014's total) and climbing from No. 107 to No. 57 in the FBS in ypg allowed (391.3). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D?** "They create mismatches. Your running back has to block their linebackers off the edge, and that creates a lot of sacks. The biggest way to combat that is to not always be in a dropback series." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4–8 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Brandon Silvers: 2,378 yards**
RUSHING Brandon Burks: 1,005 yards
RECEIVING Teddy Ruben: 879 yards
TACKLES Montres Kitchens: 79
SACKS **Rashad Dillard: 7**
INTERCEPTIONS Lamarcus Farmer: 3

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 6.7
FPI CHANCE TROY WINS

9/3 vs. Austin Peay **99%** ● **9/10** @ Clemson **1%** ● **9/17** @ Southern Miss **35%** ● **9/24** vs. New Mexico State **81%** ● **10/1** @ Idaho **54%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** vs. Georgia State **68%** ● **10/20** @ South Alabama **65%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** vs. Massachusetts **87%** ● **11/12** vs. Appalachian State **33%** ● **11/17** vs. Arkansas State **50%** ● **11/26** @ Texas State **72%** ● **12/3** @ Georgia Southern **24%**

6 Georgia State

COACH Trent Miles (4th season)
7–30 (0–1 in bowl games)

Trent Miles transformed 2014's one-win squad into a bowl team. Despite QB concerns, a plethora of weapons will help his bid for a second postseason run. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON WR Penny Hart
At 5-foot-8, 170 pounds, he's the biggest little man on campus. Hart's 1,099 receiving yards and eight TDs were second among all FBS freshman receivers last year.

X-FACTOR The cornerbacks
Chandon Sullivan and Jerome Smith were solid in 2015—94 total tackles, 3 INTs—but Miles tabs the duo for more pressure looks this fall.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
Four candidates will vie to replace 2015's Sun Belt POY, Nick Arbuckle, including dynamic graduate transfer Conner Manning (Utah), a former three-star recruit who passed for 4,219 yards as a high school junior.

THE PRESSER

Hart led the Sun Belt with seven catches of 40-plus yards last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CONTAIN HIM?** "You've got to get to the QB. Make the ball come out high or low so Hart doesn't catch the ball on the move and hit the seam. If he hits those seams, he's going to the end zone." —Sun Belt head coach

Opposing passers were rarely rattled in 2015, with the Panthers sacking QBs on just 3.8 percent of plays, No. 119 in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CAPITALIZE ON THAT DEFICIENCY?** "You don't say, 'Well, they don't have a good pass rush, so we're going to throw it every down.' But maybe there's a matchup or two you exploit. Maybe you have the time to make a double move." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 6–7 (5–3)
BOWL GAME AutoNation Cure Bowl vs. San Jose State, 27-16 L
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Nick Arbuckle: 4,368 yards
RUSHING **Glenn Smith: 356 yards**
RECEIVING **Penny Hart: 1,099 yards**
TACKLES Joseph Peterson: 116
SACKS **Mackendy Cheridor: 3**
INTERCEPTIONS Tarris Batiste: 4

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.6
FPI CHANCE GEORGIA STATE WINS

9/2 vs. Ball State **63%** ● **9/10** @ Air Force **15%** ● **9/17** @ Wisconsin **5%** ● **9/24** BYE ● **10/1** @ Appalachian State **18%** ● **10/8** vs. Texas State **81%** ● **10/15** @ Troy **32%** ● **10/22** vs. UT Martin **83%** ● **10/29** @ South Alabama **57%** ● **11/3** vs. Arkansas State **43%** ● **11/12** vs. UL Monroe **81%** ● **11/19** vs. Georgia Southern **35%** ● **11/26** BYE ● **12/3** @ Idaho **50%**

7 Idaho

COACH Paul Petrino (4th season)
6–29 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Sun Belt won't renew with Idaho past 2017, but before the Vandals leave, they will look to end a six-year bowl drought. QB Matt Linehan is the pivot point. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Matt Linehan
The son of Dallas Cowboys OC Scott Linehan had a 63.8 QBR as Idaho scored 30.3 ppg—its best clip since 2009.

X-FACTOR The offensive line
The Big Uglies by the numbers: four returning starters; 83 career starts; 6-foot-5½ and 307 pounds on average. Those measurables will prove crucial in opening lanes for a duo of backs taking over for Elijhaa Penny, who accounted for nearly 75 percent of all RB carries last year.

POSITION BATTLE Linebacker
Redshirt freshmen Darius Liles and Mike Linehan (Matt's brother) compete to anchor a D that gave up 42.1 ppg (T122 in the FBS).

THE PRESSER

No Sun Belt QB was more accurate than Linehan in 2015: 63.4 completion percentage. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT LINEHAN'S STRENGTHS?** "He's a guy where, if you allow him to sit in one spot, it will be a long day. You have to make him uncomfortable. Change things that he sees to make him hold on to the ball a little bit longer." —Sun Belt head coach

A secondary that returns almost entirely intact will aim to improve its 7.9 ypa allowed, No. 100 in the FBS last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE D?** "The biggest thing was spreading them out with formations, getting a lot of four- and five-WR looks and making them play in space. We felt like we had an advantage athletically in space." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 4–8 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING **Matt Linehan: 2,992 yards**
RUSHING Elijhaa Penny: 1,163 yards
RECEIVING Dezmon Epps: 757 yards
TACKLES Broc Westlake: 87
SACKS Quinton Bradley: 6
INTERCEPTIONS Marc Millan: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 5.0
FPI CHANCE IDAHO WINS

9/1 vs. Montana State **79%** ● **9/10** @ Washington **2%** ● **9/17** @ Washington State **5%** ● **9/24** @ UNLV **34%** ● **10/1** vs. Troy **47%** ● **10/8** @ UL Monroe **55%** ● **10/15** vs. New Mexico State **65%** ● **10/22** @ Appalachian State **9%** ● **10/29** BYE ● **11/5** @ UL Lafayette **24%** ● **11/12** @ Texas State **55%** ● **11/19** BYE ● **11/26** vs. South Alabama **72%** ● **12/3** vs. Georgia State **50%**

8 South Alabama

COACH Joey Jones (8th season)
42–35 (0–1 in bowl games)

No sure answer at QB. No rushers to get to the QB. For the Jags to match 2015's five wins, they'll need their versatile tight end and new-look D to mask those holes. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON TE Gerald Everett
The UAB transfer led the Jaguars in receptions (41), yards (575) and TDs (eight), and even proved useful in the run game. Everett rushed for four more scores on eight attempts last year.

X-FACTOR New DC Kane Wommack
Opponents hit pay dirt on 76.9 percent of red zone drives, third most in the FBS. Wommack hopes to stanch that via a 4-2-5, a new look that will leverage his wealth of aggressive DBs.

POSITION BATTLE Quarterback
A trio of sophomores—last year's backup Dallas Davis and transfers Cole Garvin (Marshall) and Evan Orth (UAB)—are largely untested. Only Davis has seen collegiate action (23 attempts).

THE PRESSER

Everett's 14.0 ypc was the sixth-highest clip among FBS tight ends last year. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO KEEP EVERETT IN CHECK?** "You have to limit his catches, and that may mean rolling the coverage toward him or doubling him." —Sun Belt head coach

The hope for Wommack's 4-2-5? That it will slow down the Sun Belt's glut of up-tempo spreads. South Alabama allowed 35.8 ppg in league play last year (fourth most in the conference). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO GAME-PLAN FOR A 4-2-5?** "There's a lot more opportunity to read defensive ends to run your zone schemes. Maybe you run a little bit more pin and pull, you run a little bit more outside scheme." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 5–7 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None
TEAM LEADERS (returners in bold)
PASSING Cody Clemments: 2,272 yards
RUSHING **Xavier Johnson: 956 yards**
RECEIVING **Gerald Everett: 575 yards**
TACKLES Blake Dees: 102
SACKS Akeem Lewis: 2
INTERCEPTIONS E.J. May: 2

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 4.0
FPI CHANCE SOUTH ALABAMA WINS

9/3 @ Mississippi State **2%** ● **9/10** vs. Georgia Southern **23%** ● **9/17** @ UL Lafayette **22%** ● **9/24** vs. Nicholls State **96%** ● **10/1** vs. San Diego State **15%** ● **10/8** BYE ● **10/15** @ Arkansas State **18%** ● **10/20** vs. Troy **35%** ● **10/29** vs. Georgia State **43%** ● **11/5** @ UL Monroe **52%** ● **11/12** BYE ● **11/19** @ LSU **1%** ● **11/26** @ Idaho **28%** ● **12/3** vs. New Mexico State **63%**

9 New Mexico State

COACH Doug Martin (4th season)
7–29 (0–0 in bowl games)

The Aggies haven't gone bowling since the Eisenhower administration. Don't look for any happier days with a D this dreadful (No. 124 in the FBS last year). —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON RB Larry Rose III
Only three FBS players had more than Rose's three games of 200-plus rush yards in 2015: Wyoming's Brian Hill, Leonard Fournette and Derrick Henry. Not bad company. He is an aerial threat too: 30 catches, 283 yards and two TDs.

THE PRESSER

DB Terrill Hanks amassed 6½ TFLs, second most on the team, as a true freshman in 2015. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO BEAT HANKS?** "He's long and rangy. You've got to try to fatigue him so he has to play at your tempo, not his." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (3–5)
BOWL GAME None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.3
FPI CHANCE NMSU WINS

9/3 @ UTEP **43%** • **9/10** vs. New Mexico **32%** • **9/17** @ Kentucky **6%** • **9/24** @ Troy **19%** • **10/1** vs. UL Lafayette **35%** • **10/8** BYE • **10/15** @ Idaho **35%** • **10/22** vs. Georgia Southern **23%** • **10/29** @ Texas A&M **1%** • **11/5** BYE • **11/12** @ Arkansas State **16%** • **11/19** vs. Texas State **65%** • **11/26** vs. Appalachian State **17%** • **12/3** @ South Alabama **37%**

10 Texas State

COACH Everett Withers (1st season)

The already-fast Bobcats want to play even faster (stated goal: 90 snaps per game), but even record-setting pace on offense can't atone for a porous defense. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

POSITION BATTLE Wide receiver
Last year's top four pass catchers are gone, which leaves junior Demun Mercer—with 19 catches—as the leading returner. Look for redshirt freshman Justin Gamble, who impressed in fall camp last year, to vie for reps.

THE PRESSER

The Bobcats surrendered 60 plays of 25-plus yards in 2015, third most in the FBS. **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO EXPLOIT THE D?** "We created explosion plays and were able to get out in front. That's the biggest thing when you play them." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 3–9 (2–6)
BOWL GAME None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.4
FPI CHANCE TEXAS ST. WINS

9/3 @ Ohio **18%** • **9/10** BYE • **9/17** @ Arkansas **2%** • **9/24** vs. Houston **7%** • **10/1** vs. Incarnate Word **93%** • **10/8** @ Georgia State **19%** • **10/15** @ UL Monroe **42%** • **10/22** vs. UL Lafayette **27%** • **10/29** BYE • **11/5** @ Appalachian State **6%** • **11/12** vs. Idaho **45%** • **11/19** @ New Mexico State **35%** • **11/26** vs. Troy **28%** • **12/3** vs. Arkansas State **22%**

11 UL Monroe

COACH Matt Viator (1st season)

The Warhawks, Sun Belt cellar dwellers in 2015, won't find 2016 much friendlier. Their 21.0 ppg ranked 111th in the FBS last year. And their 36.5 allowed? 112th. —M.T.

GET YOUR PROGRAM!

ALL EYES ON QB Garrett Smith
On this offense (310.8 ypg, No. 122 in the FBS), even modest production is a plus. As a redshirt freshman last year, Smith tossed 17 TDs (No. 5 in the Sun Belt) and found classmate Marcus Green for 15 gains of 10-plus yards.

THE PRESSER

ULM's seven rush TDs ranked last in the Sun Belt—and was half the next-lowest total (Troy). **COACH, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW TO CAPITALIZE ON A WEAK RUSH?** "If a team is struggling to run, we're going to load the box to make them one-dimensional." —Sun Belt head coach

LAST SEASON

RECORD 2–11 (1–7)
BOWL GAME None

SCHEDULE

FPI PROJECTED WINS: 3.3
FPI CHANCE ULM WINS

9/3 vs. Southern **90%** • **9/10** @ Oklahoma **1%** • **9/17** @ Georgia Southern **8%** • **9/24** BYE • **10/1** @ Auburn **2%** • **10/8** vs. Idaho **45%** • **10/15** vs. Texas State **58%** • **10/22** @ New Mexico **14%** • **10/29** @ Arkansas State **10%** • **11/5** vs. South Alabama **48%** • **11/12** @ Georgia State **19%** • **11/19** @ Appalachian State **6%** • **11/26** BYE • **12/3** vs. UL Lafayette **29%**

RECRUIT WATCH

2016 Top 25 Classes

Since '06, every national champ has reeled in a top-10 recruiting class the year before its title. So yeah, 'crootin' matters. Here's a roll call of the top classes of 2016.

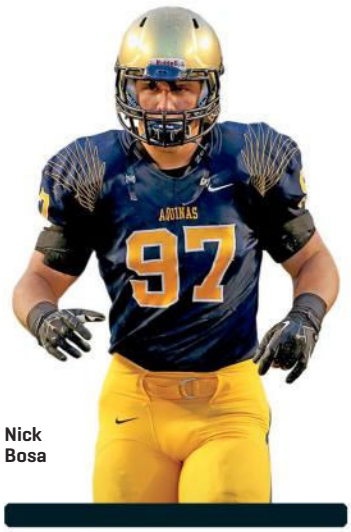
1 FLORIDA STATE
For the first time in five years, a team *not* named Alabama tops the rankings. The Noles dethroned the Tide thanks in no small part to a slew of signing-day blue-chip preps: Six of FSU's 16 ESPN 300 prospects, including CB Carlos Becker (Kissimmee, Fla.; ESPN 300: No. 46), committed on Feb. 3.

2 ALABAMA
Don't look for a drop-off in the Tide's trenches: Bama landed a bevy of big men to open up holes for the nation's top-ranked running back, B.J. Emmons (Morganton, N.C.; No. 33). Leading the way will be the No. 3 OT, Jonah Williams (Folsom, Calif.; No. 25), the No. 3 OG, Chris Owens (Arlington, Texas; No. 76) and the nation's best juco prospect, OT Charles Baldwin (Windsor, Conn.).

3 LSU
The Tigers began Feb. 3 with the nation's top class, and despite a two-spot drop by day's end, their laser focus on the D-line and secondary paid dividends—11 of LSU's 19 ESPN 300 signees line up on one of those two units. DT Rashard Lawrence (Monroe, La.; No. 12) and CB Kristian Fulton (Metairie, La.; No. 27) top the list.

4 OLE MISS
After falling out of recruiting's top 15 last year, Ole Miss bounced back in a big way in 2016, inking two top-10 ESPN 300 prospects: OT Gregory Little (Allen, Texas; No. 2) and DT Benito Jones (Waynesboro, Miss.; No. 7). The Rebels did more than just dominate the trenches, though, stockpiling seven ESPN 300 skill players, compared with just three in 2015.

5 OHIO STATE
The Buckeyes staved off that team up north to land the Big Ten's top class for the sixth straight year. OSU raided the ESPN 300 to tap its next Bosa defensive end (Nick, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; No. 3) and heirs apparent for RB Ezekiel Elliott: speedy Demario McCall (North Ridgeville, Ohio; No. 38) and powerful Antonio Williams (New London, N.C.; No. 148).



Nick Bosa

6 MICHIGAN
In his first full recruiting cycle, Jim Harbaugh landed 15 ESPN 300 recruits—more than triple 2015's haul—headlined by the country's highest-ranked prep, DT Rashan Gary (Paramus, N.J.). Even more promising? The Wolverines' foothold in Florida: Three of their ESPN 300 signees call the Sunshine State home.

7 GEORGIA
For the first time in three years, the Dawgs' class does not claim a top-three in-state prospect. But across-the-line talent kept UGa in the top 10, with the No. 1 QB (Jacob Eason; Lake Stevens, Wash.; No. 13) and No. 1 TE (Isaac Nauta; Bradenton, Fla.; No. 8) both enrolling early—and ready to start on day one.

8 CLEMSON
Dabo Swinney has transformed the Tigers into an annual top-10 recruiting fixture, and in 2016 he was one of just three coaches in the nation to land three top-25 preps. DT Dexter Lawrence (Wake Forest, N.C.; No. 6) chose Clemson over Alabama, USC and Ohio State.

9 AUBURN
Down their top two pass catchers from '15 (Ricardo Louis, Melvin Ray), the Tigers needed to haul in receivers in the '16 class. All heading to the Plains: No. 2 WR Nate Craig-Myers (Tampa, Fla.; No. 37), No. 5 WR Kyle Davis (Lawrenceville, Ga.; No. 54) and No. 14 WR Eli Stove (Niceville, Fla.; No. 113).

10 TEXAS
The Longhorns won signing day, skyrocketing 22 spots on Feb. 3 to finish with a top-10 class. They brought in six ESPN 300 preps that day alone, headlined by the nation's second-ranked LB, Jeffrey McCulloch (Aldine, Texas; No. 26).

7

Bama jumped seven spots on signing day and landed its sixth straight recruiting class ranked top two in the nation.

STUART BROWNING/MAXPREPS

NG NATION

Bama ousted! Michigan nipping at Ohio State's heels! Texas back from the dead! Signing day 2016 had a little bit of everything, so we turned to RecruitingNation to break down the teams that won Feb. 3 and the instant-impact freshmen who will win this fall. And since recruiting never sleeps, we look ahead to 2017 too.

BY GERRY HAMILTON AND CRAIG HAUBERT

Jacob Eason

11 USC
New coach Clay Helton turned a seemingly disappointing class—just 13 commits at the start of Feb. 3—into a near-top-10 group with a late flip from a Florida State pledge, S Jamel Cook (Miami; No. 73), and a surprise commit from onetime Georgia lock E.J. Price (Lawrenceville, Ga.; No. 90).

12 FLORIDA
Parlaying an SEC East title into a solid haul, the Gators nabbed a trio of top-30 wideouts, including signing-day flip Tyrie Cleveland (Houston; No. 52). That's huge for a team in need of a playmaking complement to WR Antonio Callaway.

13 STANFORD
The Cardinal's six total ESPN 300 recruits was the fewest of any team in the top 15, but David Shaw's commitment to national recruiting continues to reap rewards. Two of Stanford's three highest-ranked signees came from out of state: TE Kaden Smith (Flower Mound, Texas; No. 39) and OT Clark Yarbrough (Woodberry Forest, Va.; No. 119).

14 TENNESSEE
After two straight top-five classes for Butch Jones, the Vols dropped a tick to land the SEC East's third-best group. Still, a late push helped, especially a signing-day-eve pledge from the No. 1 ATH, Tyler Byrd (Naples, Fla.; No. 35).

15 UCLA
Four of the Bruins' nine ESPN 300 commitments came on Feb. 3, including LB Mique Juarez (Torrance, Calif.; No. 30). UCLA climbed four spots on signing day, the fourth-biggest jump among teams in the top 25.

16 NOTRE DAME
The offensive line, perhaps the Irish's primary recruiting need, looks golden for the future: OTs Liam Eichenberg (Cleveland; No. 67) and Tommy Kraemer (Cincinnati; No. 99) were Notre Dame's two highest-ranked preps.

17 BAYLOR
As is tradition in Waco, the Bears welcome a host of speedy playmakers at WR, led by Texas 100-meter state champ Devin Duvernay (Sachse, Texas; No. 42).

18 PENN STATE
James Franklin maintained his recruiting prowess in Year 2 with eight ESPN 300 athletes and perhaps the Lions' next great pass rusher, DE Shane Simmons (Hyattsville, Md.; No. 14). PSU joined Michigan and OSU as the only Big Ten teams to ink more than five blue chips.

19 MIAMI (FLA.)
The Canes surged after hiring Mark Richt in early December, landing DE Patrick Bethel (Vero Beach, Fla.; No. 111) on Dec. 14 and WR Ahmmon Richards (Wellington, Fla.; No. 212) on signing day.

20 TEXAS A&M
Despite their lowest recruiting finish since '11, the Aggies loaded up on D, with tackling-machine ATH Aaron Hansford (Washington, D.C.; No. 137) and DE Justin Madubuike (McKinney, Texas; No. 75).

21 OKLAHOMA
The Fresno-to-Norman pipeline continues to be fruitful for the Sooners, who cashed in on their 11–1 season for a big recruiting boost from California's Central Valley: the No. 7 OLB in the nation, Caleb Kelly.

22 MICHIGAN STATE
Mark Dantonio's tried-and-true formula—load up on three-stars (11 in 2016), with a smattering of ESPN 300 studs (four)—helped the Spartans to a top-25 finish, incredibly their first since our rankings began in '06.

23 TCU
Josh Doctson is off to the NFL, but the Horned Frogs worked fast to find their receivers of the future. Isaiah Graham (Bastrop, La.; No. 105) joins a pair of top-five ESPN JC 50 wideouts, Ryan Parker (Keller, Texas) and Taj Williams (Tallahassee, Fla.).

24 ARKANSAS
The Razorbacks secured their second top-25 class in as many years after missing the cut the prior three. Hometown product and 11th-ranked prep DE McTelvin Agim (Hope, Ark.), a terror in the trenches, provided the biggest boost.

25 ARIZONA STATE
Todd Graham's best get was WR N'keal Harry (Chandler, Ariz.; No. 22), but his out-of-state work pushed the Sun Devils into the top 25. ASU landed four-star recruits from five other states, led by QB Dillon Sterling-Cole (Houston; No. 205) and the nation's No. 2 center, Cohl Cabral (Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.; No. 199).

VINCE MILLER/MAXPREPS

Tom Luginbill's Instant-Impact Freshmen

Remember the names of these 10 blue chips primed to make a big splash come fall.

1

Rashan Gary, the No. 1 prep, is Michigan's first top-ranked signee since our rankings began in 2006.

1 DT **Rashan Gary**, Michigan
Hands down, Gary is the most important defensive freshman addition this year. He's an interior lineman who also gets to the QB—three sacks in the 2016 Under Armour All-America Game—a force reminiscent of current New York Jets DE Leonard Williams (USC). Given Gary's rare size and quickness (6-4, 287; 4.86 40), plus his knack for disruptive impact, the Paramus, N.J., native will be in contention to start from day one.

2 DE **Nick Bosa**, Ohio State
The Buckeyes have major changes along the front after losing D-line stalwarts Tommy Schutt, Joel Hale and, most critically, Bosa's brother Joey. But if Nick performs half as well as his older brother did as a freshman (7½ sacks in 2013), Ohio State will be in good shape. He's already adept at getting to the QB (five sacks in seven games before tearing his right ACL as a senior at St. Thomas Aquinas High in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.) and is more flexible at this stage than Joey.

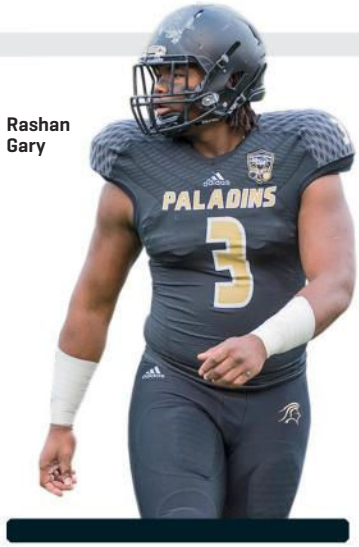
3 CB **Levonta Taylor**, Florida State
Of all the true freshmen who have excelled right away in the secondary for FSU—Jalen Ramsey, Greg Reid, Ronald Darby, Lamarcus Joyner—none was as gifted a true cover guy as Taylor. He may not have great size (5-11, 183), but he can hold up on an island and make plays.

4 QB **Jacob Eason**, Georgia
Eason, the top-ranked pocket passer in 2016, looks destined to be thrown into the fire early by first-year coach Kirby Smart. Last year's starter, Greyson Lambert, returns after a solid 2015 campaign (67.6 QBR, No. 43 in the FBS in 2015), but Eason's prototypical size (6-6, 217) and enviable arm strength look too good to ignore. The good news for the true freshman is he'll be surrounded by experience that can help shoulder the load in Athens—14 starters return, including Heisman hopeful RB Nick Chubb.

5 C **Baveon Johnson**, Florida State
Given the shaky state of FSU's O-line—most glaring in the Noles' Peach Bowl loss to Houston, when it failed to open up holes for star RB Dalvin Cook (1.8 ypc)—Johnson not only projects to be a starter, he's in the mix at guard *and* center. He is arguably the most college-ready interior lineman of the past decade, thanks to his ability to control and stay in front of rushers once locked on and his outstanding strength and size (6-3, 340).

6 WR **Devin Duvernay**, Baylor
The Bears can never have enough pass catchers: Last year's standout, Corey Coleman, followed predecessors Terrance Williams, Kendall Wright and Josh Gordon to the NFL, and Duvernay looks to be next in line at Wide Receiver U. The Texas native will bring his blazing speed to Waco (4.38 40), which no one on Baylor's current roster possesses.

7 RB **Demario McCall**, Ohio State
With Ezekiel Elliott (and his 1,821 rush yards from 2015) off to the NFL, RB Curtis Samuel will likely assume the reins in the Ohio State backfield. But expect Samuel to get a boost—and a push—from McCall, who adds another dimension to the offense, not just from a depth standpoint but as a home run threat who can offer a much-needed change of pace. McCall doesn't have Samuel's speed but boasts physical toughness in a scatback's frame.



Rashan Gary

8 QB **Feleipe' Franks**, Florida
The Gators won 10 games with since-transferred redshirt freshman Will Grier and middling sophomore Treon Harris (45.6 team QBR, No. 94 in '15). Could a true freshman be an upgrade? A strong arm (35 TDs, 2 INTs last fall at Wakulla County in Crawfordville, Fla.) will give him a chance to beat out senior Austin Appleby and soph Luke Del Rio.

9 DE **Jonathan Cooper**, Ohio State
As a designated pass rusher, look for Cooper (6-3, 238) to take on a role similar to that of Florida State's Josh Sweat, who was used as a situational player off the edge in 2015. That could provide the platform for Cooper to be brought along at a similarly slow pace throughout the season and allow him to use his speed to make plays on the perimeter.

10 DT **Dexter Lawrence**, Clemson
When Lawrence plays to his ability, he is the only recruit in this class comparable to Rashan Gary—a big man (6-5, 335) with an excellent combination of size, quickness and agility. If he comes close to producing like Christian Wilkins did for the Tigers as a freshman last year, he'll add yet another impact player at a value position for playoff hopeful Clemson.

2017 ESPN 300 Top 25

Quick! Only eight months remain before signing day 2017 is upon us. Get an early read on next February's top-ranked prospects.

1 OT **Trey Smith**, Jackson, Tenn.
Undeclared

2 OT **Isaiah Wilson**, New York City
Undeclared

3 OLB **Jaelan Phillips**, Redlands, Calif.
UCLA

4 RB **Najee Harris**, Antioch, Calif.
Alabama

5 DE **Robert Beal**, Norcross, Ga.
Undeclared

6 ATH **Dylan Moses**, Bradenton, Fla.
Undeclared

7 DT **Marvin Wilson**, Houston
Undeclared

8 S **Jeffrey Okudah**, Grand Prairie, Texas
Undeclared

9 OT **Alex Leatherwood**, Pensacola, Fla.
Alabama

10 WR **DeAngelo Gibbs**, Suwanee, Ga.
Undeclared

JOHN JONES/MAXPREPS

2017 Recruiting Forecast

The First Family of College Football

Another McCaffrey will enter the game in 2017—2,400 miles from his Heisman-finalist older brother.

When it came time for Dylan McCaffrey to commit, an unlikely person proved pivotal to the nation's top quarterback for 2017.

The 6-4, 195-pound pocket passer is the younger brother of Stanford's do-it-all Heisman favorite Christian, son of Super Bowl winner and former Cardinal great Ed and Stanford soccer alum Lisa. So naturally, Dylan turned to Grandma.

"Honestly, I've been a Michigan fan since I was little," McCaffrey says. "My grandma is a big Michigan fan. I could've always seen myself going there, and in the end I just went back to how I felt about Michigan as a kid."

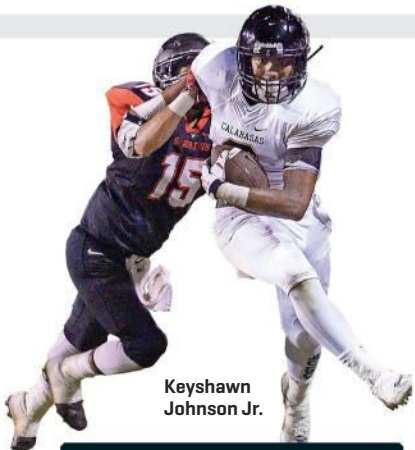
Many believed Stanford would be his eventual landing spot because of his many ties to the Cardinal. But even if Stanford had offered, McCaffrey says he wanted to create his own story.

"It would be the best decision for my future to not just go somewhere I have a lot of family ties," he says.

UM gets a strong-armed, accurate pocket passer with polish (27 TDs, 4 INTs as a junior at Valor Christian in Highlands Ranch, Colo.) and a kindred spirit to future coach Jim Harbaugh.

"One thing that stands out with [Harbaugh's] career is that he loves to win," McCaffrey says. "And I see a lot of that in myself." —TOM VANHAAREN

Dylan McCaffrey



Keyshawn Johnson Jr.

The Legacies

Three more names that might ring a bell.

WR **Hunter Rison**
Ann Arbor, Mich.
ESPN 300 rank 270
This crisp route runner will follow father Andre, a five-time Pro Bowl WR, to East Lansing. Rison decommitted from Michigan State in November, then recommitted in April over the likes of Ohio State, Miami and Oklahoma.

WR **Keyshawn Johnson Jr.**
Calabasas, Calif.
ESPN 300 rank 273
The son and namesake of a three-time Pro Bowl WR, Keyshawn Jr. is a well-schooled wideout with good hands. He's Lincoln-bound, committing to Nebraska over USC (his father's alma mater), Alabama, Clemson and Ohio State.

QB **Griffin Alstott**
St. Petersburg, Fla.
ESPN 300 rank NR
Like his father, six-time Pro Bowl FB Mike Alstott, Griffin is physically impressive: He boasts a strong arm and the ability to make plays outside the pocket. Also like Dad? He has decided to play his college ball at Purdue.

The Early Birds

The usual suspects are off to fast 2017 recruiting starts.

ALABAMA
Excluding his first year in Tuscaloosa, every Nick Saban–recruited class at Bama has finished in the top three in the nation. The Tide are rolling again in 2017, with commitments from the top RB in the country, Najee Harris (Antioch, Calif.; No. 4 in the ESPN 300), top-three OT Alex Leatherwood (Pensacola, Fla.; No. 9) and top-five pocket passer Jake Fromm (Warner Robins, Ga.; No. 102).

CLEMSON
In preparation for the post–Deshaun Watson era, Clemson already claims a pair of top-11 ESPN 300 pocket passers: Hunter Johnson (Brownsburg, Ind.; No. 50) and Chase Brice (Loganville, Ga.; No. 185).

MIAMI
Mark Richt has continued the Canes' proclivity for early recruiting success: Four ESPN 300 commitments are headed to Coral Gables. And the talent is local, with eight preps total from the Miami area, including No. 6 RB Robert Burns.

OHIO STATE
The Buckeyes are well on their way to a seventh straight finish atop the Big Ten recruiting rankings, and they're getting it done in Florida. Three of the state's top 25 prospects are already on board, including the No. 1 cornerback and No. 3 safety in the 2017 class, Shaun Wade (Jacksonville, Fla.; No. 13) and Isaiah Pryor (Bradenton, Fla.; No. 46).

OKLAHOMA
The Sooners are seeking their first top-10 class since 2010, and so far much of Bob Stoops' success has come across the Red River. Four of OU's eight ESPN 300 commitments, including dual-threat QB Chris Robison (Mesquite, Texas; No. 248), are Lone Star prospects.

FROM TOP: MICHAEL COONS/ACORN NEWSPAPERS; PAUL DISALVO/MAXPREPS

11 S **Richard LeCounte III**, Hinesville, Ga.
Georgia

12 WR **Donovan Peoples-Jones**, Detroit
Undeclared

13 CB **Shaun Wade**, Jacksonville, Fla.
Ohio State

14 OT **Austin Deculus**, Cypress, Texas
Undeclared

15 WR **Joseph Lewis**, Los Angeles
Undeclared

16 OT **Josh Myers**, Miamisburg, Ohio
Ohio State

17 DT **Tyler Shelvin**, Crowley, La.
LSU

18 DE **Joshua Kaindoh**, Bradenton, Fla.
Undeclared

19 QB **Dylan McCaffrey**, Highlands Ranch, Colo.
Michigan

20 OT **Calvin Ashley**, Orlando, Fla.
Auburn

21 WR **James Robinson IV**, Lakeland, Fla.
Undeclared

22 ATH **JaCoby Stevens**, Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Undeclared

23 RB **Cam Akers**, Clinton, Miss.
Undeclared

24 OT **Foster Sarell**, Graham, Wash.
Undeclared

25 CB **Kary Vincent**, Port Arthur, Texas
Undeclared

2017 NFL DRAFT

The lights have barely dimmed on the 2016 NFL draft, but Insider experts Mel Kiper Jr. and Todd McShay aren't ones for procrastination. They're already breaking down film of the next group of college stars ready to shine as top picks next spring.

MEL & TODD'S TOP NFL PROSPECTS TO WATCH*

QUARTERBACKS
Deshaun Watson
Jr., Clemson

Brad Kaaya
Jr., Miami (Fla.)

Mitch Leidner
Sr., Minnesota

RUNNING BACKS
Leonard Fournette
Jr., LSU

Dalvin Cook
Jr., Florida State

Christian McCaffrey
Jr., Stanford

WIDE RECEIVERS
JuJu Smith-Schuster
Jr., USC

Malachi Dupre
Jr., LSU

Mike Williams
Sr., Clemson

OFFENSIVE LINE
OT **Cam Robinson**
Jr., Alabama

OT **Roderick Johnson**
Jr., Florida State

OT **Zach Banner**
Sr., USC

DEFENSIVE LINE
DE **Myles Garrett**
Jr., Texas A&M

DE **Jonathan Allen**
Sr., Alabama

DT **Malik McDowell**
Jr., Michigan State

LINEBACKERS
OLB **Tim Williams**
Sr., Alabama

OLB **Jarrad Davis**
Sr., Florida

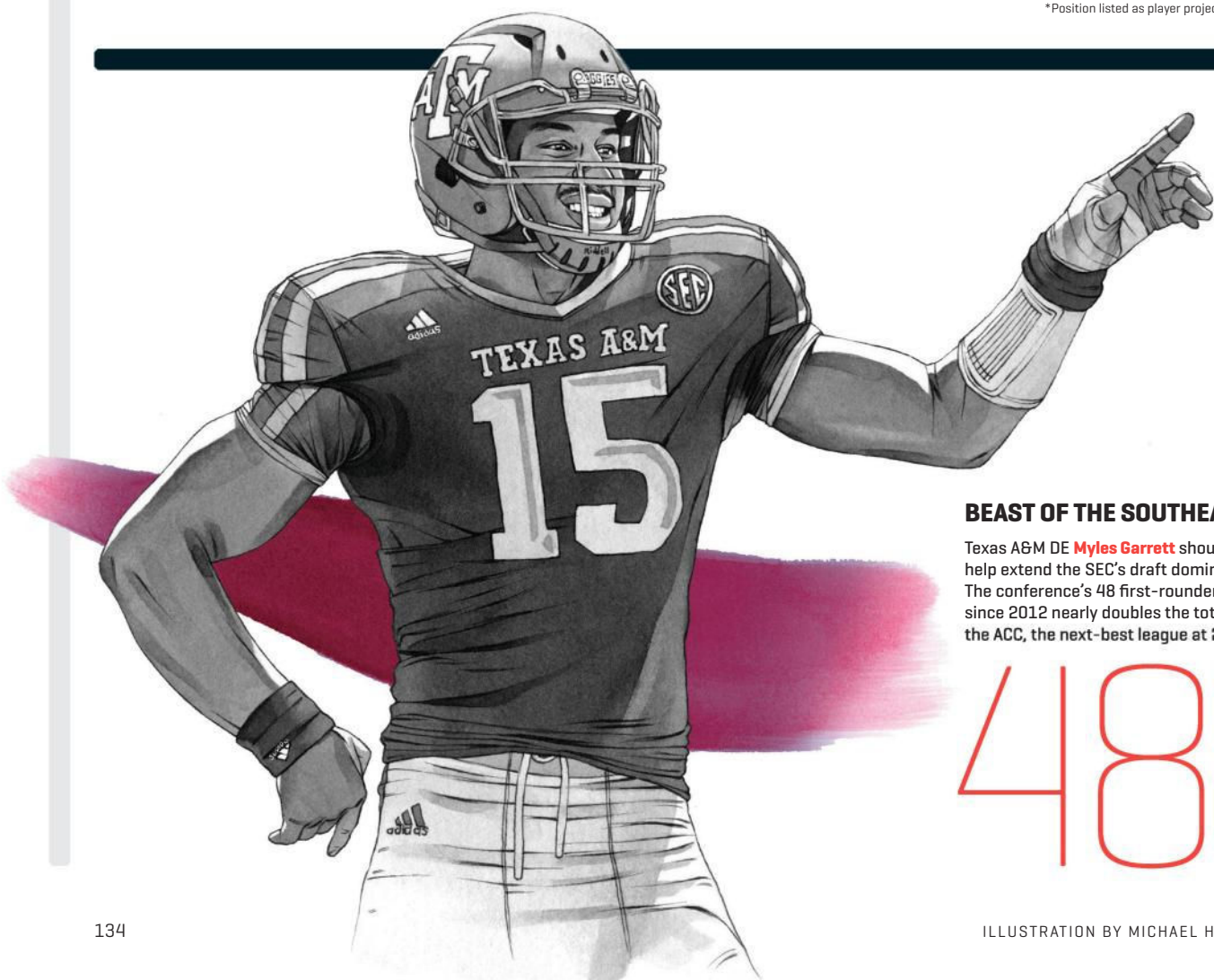
ILB **Reuben Foster**
Sr., Alabama

DEFENSIVE BACKS
SS **Jabrill Peppers**
So., Michigan

CB **Jalen Tabor**
Jr., Florida

FS **Jamal Adams**
Jr., LSU

*Position listed as player projects in the NFL.



BEAST OF THE SOUTHEAST

Texas A&M DE **Myles Garrett** should help extend the SEC's draft dominance. The conference's 48 first-rounders since 2012 nearly doubles the total of the ACC, the next-best league at 27.

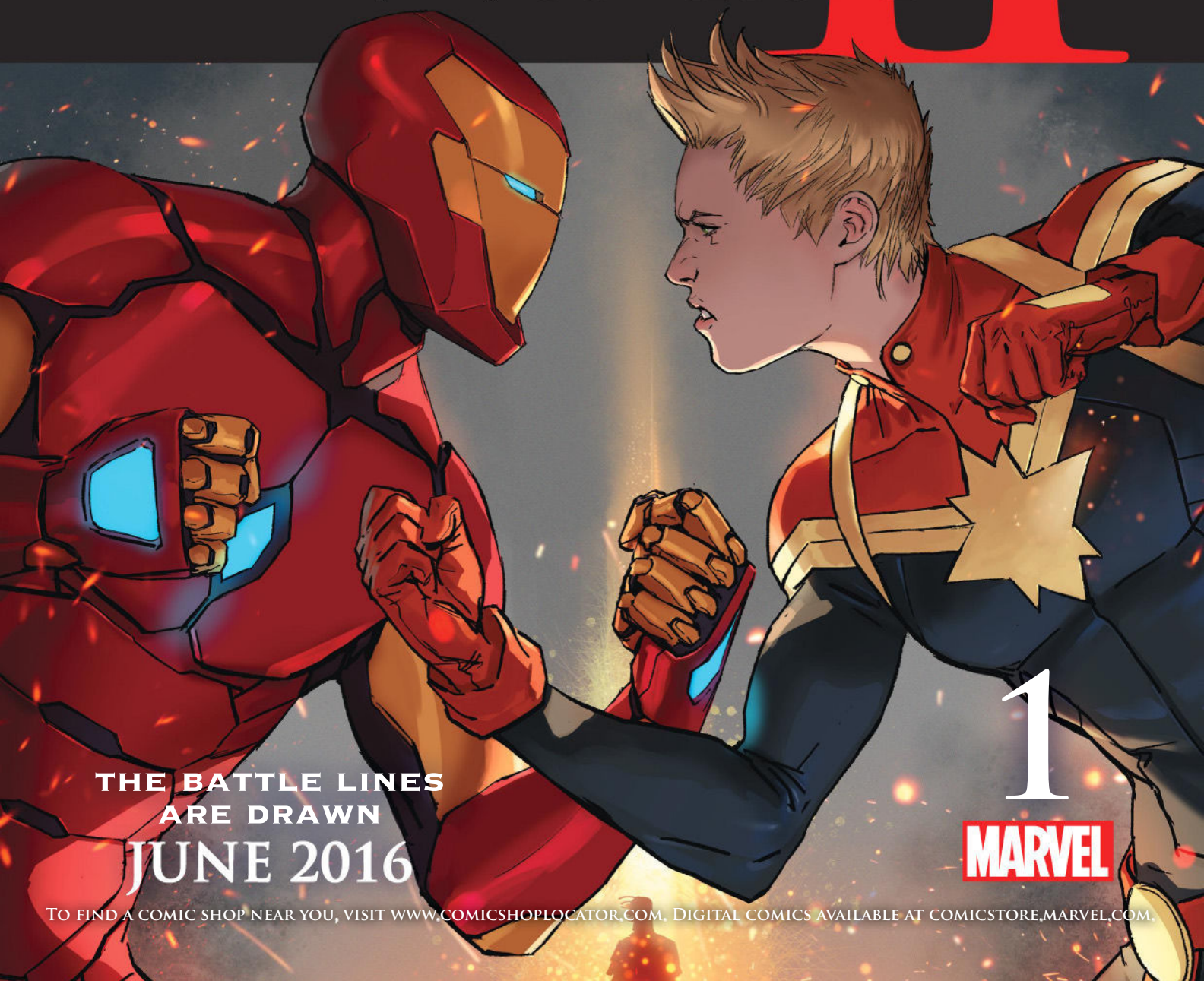
48

ILLUSTRATION PHOTO REFERENCE: TROY TAORMINA/USA TODAY SPORTS

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL HOEWELER

BENDIS • MARQUEZ • PONSOR

CIVIL WAR II



THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN

JUNE 2016

TO FIND A COMIC SHOP NEAR YOU, VISIT WWW.COMICSHOPLOCATOR.COM. DIGITAL COMICS AVAILABLE AT COMICSTORE.MARVEL.COM.

THE FOOTBALL POWER INDEX

FPI RANK*		PAGE NUMBER
1	LSU	83
2	FLORIDA STATE	18
3	OKLAHOMA	50
4	CLEMSON	19
5	TENNESSEE	76
6	ALABAMA	84
7	OLE MISS	85
8	USC	68
9	GEORGIA	77
10	OKLAHOMA STATE	51
11	MICHIGAN	34
12	LOUISVILLE	20
13	WASHINGTON	62
14	TEXAS A&M	86
15	NOTRE DAME	90
16	BAYLOR	52
17	OHIO STATE	35
18	STANFORD	63
19	UCLA	69
20	NORTH CAROLINA	25
21	AUBURN	88
22	MISSISSIPPI STATE	87
23	FLORIDA	78
24	WEST VIRGINIA	53
25	NEBRASKA	41
26	MIAMI (FLA.)	26
27	ARKANSAS	89
28	OREGON	64
29	TEXAS	54
30	PITTSBURGH	27
31	WISCONSIN	42
32	ARIZONA	70
33	TCU	55
34	MICHIGAN STATE	37
35	PENN STATE	36
36	BOISE STATE	118
37	UTAH	71
38	IOWA	43
39	SOUTH CAROLINA	79
40	VIRGINIA TECH	28
41	WASHINGTON STATE	65
42	NC STATE	21
43	BYU	91
44	SOUTH FLORIDA	94
45	TEXAS TECH	56
46	GEORGIA TECH	29
47	ARIZONA STATE	72
48	HOUSTON	97
49	CALIFORNIA	66
50	MISSOURI	80
51	BOSTON COLLEGE	22
52	NORTHWESTERN	44
53	WESTERN MICHIGAN	113
54	VANDERBILT	82
55	KENTUCKY	81
56	DUKE	30
57	KANSAS STATE	57
58	WAKE FOREST	23
59	COLORADO	73
60	SAN DIEGO STATE	121
61	SYRACUSE	24
62	INDIANA	38
63	TEMPLE	94
64	VIRGINIA	31
65	MINNESOTA	45
66	PURDUE	46
67	APPALACHIAN STATE	125
68	AIR FORCE	118
69	WESTERN KENTUCKY	101
70	CINCINNATI	95
71	IOWA STATE	58
72	OREGON STATE	67
73	ILLINOIS	47
74	MARYLAND	39
75	RUTGERS	40
76	MARSHALL	101
77	SAN JOSE STATE	121
78	TULSA	97
79	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	114
80	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	113
81	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	125
82	NAVY	98
83	UTAH STATE	119
84	CONNECTICUT	95
85	MEMPHIS	98
86	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	102
87	TOLEDO	114
88	ARKANSAS STATE	126
89	SOUTHERN MISS	104
90	BOWLING GREEN	110
91	SMU	99
92	NEVADA	122
93	LOUISIANA TECH	104
94	EAST CAROLINA	96
95	NEW MEXICO	119
96	TROY	127
97	COLORADO STATE	120
98	UL LAFAYETTE	126
99	ARMY	92
100	CENTRAL FLORIDA	96
101	WYOMING	120
102	OHIO	110
103	GEORGIA STATE	127
104	FRESNO STATE	122
105	KENT STATE	111
106	TULANE	99
107	KANSAS	59
108	UNLV	123
109	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	102
110	BALL STATE	115
111	OLD DOMINION	103
112	MIAMI (OHIO)	111
113	AKRON	112
114	RICE	105
115	BUFFALO	112
116	FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL	103
117	HAWAII	123
118	IDAHO	128
119	EASTERN MICHIGAN	115
120	SOUTH ALABAMA	128
121	NEW MEXICO STATE	129
122	UTEP	105
123	UTSA	108
124	MASSACHUSETTS	92
125	CHARLOTTE	103
126	TEXAS STATE	129
127	UL MONROE	129
128	NORTH TEXAS	108

*For an explanation of FPI, see page 16.

EACH TEAM HAS THEIR OWN ROAD TO THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF.

AND THEY ALL BEGIN LABOR DAY WEEKEND.

LSU vs. WISCONSIN
ALABAMA vs. USC
OKLAHOMA vs. HOUSTON
CLEMSON vs. AUBURN
NOTRE DAME vs. TEXAS
NORTH CAROLINA vs. GEORGIA
OLE MISS vs. FLORIDA STATE

WHO'S IN ?

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF ON ESPN

GAME DAY IS COMING

YOU SPENT MONTHS PLANNING YOUR TAILGATE

Luckily, the DISH® Playmaker™ mobile satellite antenna sets up in 15 minutes.

Initial setup time may take longer since receiver requires updating and activation.

Elevate Your Tailgate

1-888-363-4256

dishformytailgate.com

dish

Requires antenna and receiver purchase. Limit one receiver per antenna. Monthly fees and limits on number and type of receivers will apply. All prices, packages, programming, features, functionality and offers subject to change without notice. All charges, including monthly programming, pay-per-view and equipment upgrades, must be paid in advance; failure to pay by due date will lead to service disconnection within 24 hours. Offer available for new and qualified former customers, and subject to terms of applicable Promotional and Residential Customer agreements. Taxes or reimbursement charges for state gross earnings taxes may apply. Additional restrictions may apply. © 2016 DISH Network L.L.C. All rights reserved.